

Plankton are the tiny plants and animals of fresh and saltwater environments, that usually are too small to be seen without a microscope.

While they vary in size, they are unable to swim against currents and are known to mostly drift.

There are two major types of plankton:

### Zooplankton



Copepod



Rotifer



Amphipod

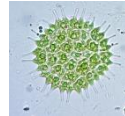
### Phytoplankton



Dinoflagellate



Cyanobacteria



Diatom

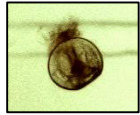
Zooplankton are tiny animals that feed on phytoplankton and other smaller zooplankton.

Phytoplankton are microscopic seaweed (algae) that obtain their energy from the sun by a process known as photosynthesis, which creates sugars for the animal to use.

Some zooplankton will spend their entire lives as a plankton. Others, are the younger forms (larvae) of sea creatures we all know and love. Examples of animals with a planktonic larval stage include:



Barnacle



Oyster



Corals

The larvae of swimming animals will grow and change into their adult form. Larvae of stationary animals settle on the ocean floor or a hard surface before they continue to grow and change.

Plankton are the most basic level of any aquatic food web, beginning with the phytoplankton that make their own food using energy from the sun (photosynthesis). Unlucky plankton are eaten by filter feeders. Filter feeders are animals which filter water in various ways, extracting small particles, like plankton, for eating. Filter feeders can range from small barnacles and sponges to some species of whales.

To avoid becoming a meal, many types of plankton have ways of escaping predators. Some undergo "Vertical Migration," which means they drift up and down in the water depending on the time of day, to avoid active predators. Others have coloring that matches the depth in which they live, making them difficult to see. Plankton that live near the surface will be almost clear, while plankton that live in deeper waters will be darker colors.

- Plankton that are unable to swim often have larger body parts that stick out from the animal to prevent them from sinking.
- Technically, Jellyfish are also plankton, as they live in the open water and are only capable of drifting, or have limited swimming ability.
- Some plankton can be toxic. Certain types of phytoplankton, called dinoflagellates, can cause "red tide." Ocean waters appear with an unnatural red-brown color. It can stop or paralyze the nervous system in sea creatures, which stops them from breathing.