

Living with a Razor-Sharp Skeleton

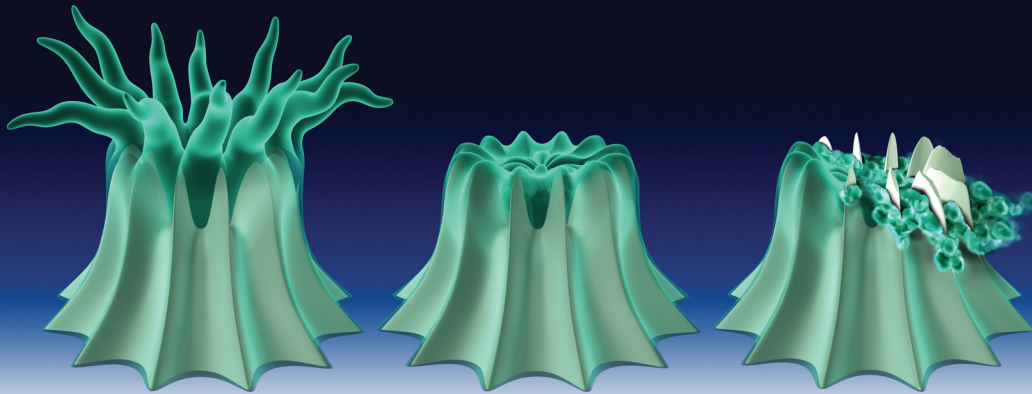


illustration: gcarlson.com

Individual coral animals are called polyps. The illustration emphasizes how the fragile tissue of each polyp rests on top of its own sharp skeleton. The polyp on the left is extended, feeding. The center coral polyp is withdrawn as it would normally be during the day. The polyp on the right shows the damage a diver would cause by brushing against it, smashing the soft polyp against its stony skeleton. Once a few polyps are killed, that section of the coral head cannot grow again.

A coral head is a colony of thousands of interconnected polyps who are clones of each other. A coral head the size of a hawksbill turtle began growing long before humans began using SCUBA gear. It takes millions of coral polyps and hundreds of years to build a reef.

Let's respect coral so our children and grandchildren will be able to enjoy living reefs, too!

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