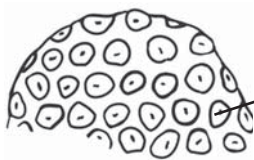


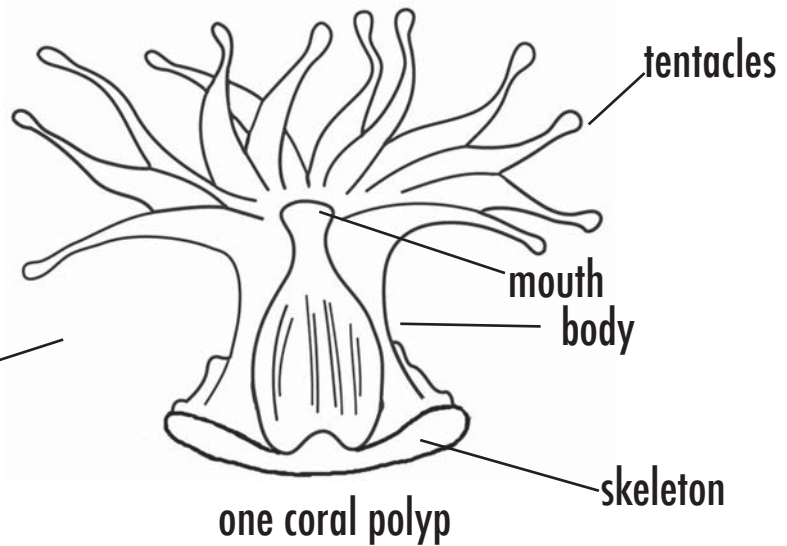
WHAT IS CORAL?

Coral is not a plant. It's an animal called a **polyp**. A polyp has a soft body with tentacles at one end. At night, the coral opens its tentacles to catch food in the water. It also gets food from **algae** that live inside its body.

Most coral is made of many tiny animals joined together as one.



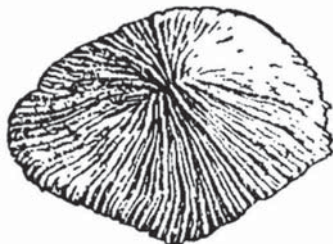
Each circle is one polyp.



one coral polyp

Coral can be soft or hard. Hard coral has a hard outer skeleton. The polyp sits on top of the skeleton. The skeleton grows up around the soft body to protect it. When the polyp dies, the hard skeleton becomes part of the coral reef.

Hard corals come in many different shapes, sizes, and colors.



mushroom coral



brain coral



staghorn coral

Soft corals have a flexible skeleton that bends.



sea fan



sea whip