

WORM TYPES

Priprema za TOEFL

Nivo: Visok

Worm Types and Their Functions

In biology, the term "worm" is often used in a very general way, but it can actually refer to several different groups of animals that only share a similar, elongated body shape. Today, we will look at three major types of worms and discuss the different functions they perform, either in natural ecosystems or inside other organisms.

Let us begin with annelids, or segmented worms. A familiar example is the earthworm. Earthworms live in soil and spend most of their time burrowing through it. As they move, they mix organic material with mineral particles and create small tunnels that allow air and water to penetrate deeper into the ground. This process improves soil structure and increases its fertility. For this reason, earthworms are often described as natural "soil engineers." Without them, many soils would become compacted and less suitable for plant growth.
Another group of annelids includes leeches. Leeches are commonly associated with blood-feeding, but this is only partly true. While some leech species do feed on the blood of vertebrates, many others are predators that feed on small invertebrates. Even blood-feeding leeches have an interesting function from a scientific perspective. Substances found in their saliva prevent blood from clotting, and these chemicals have been studied for medical use, particularly in improving blood circulation.

Next, consider nematodes, also known as roundworms. Nematodes are among the most abundant animals on Earth and can be found in soil, freshwater, marine environments, and inside living organisms. Many nematodes are harmless and play an important role in decomposing organic matter and recycling nutrients. However, some species are parasites. Parasitic nematodes can infect plants, animals, and humans, sometimes causing serious diseases or agricultural damage. Thus, their function depends strongly on whether they are free-living or parasitic.
Finally, we have flatworms. A well-known example is the tapeworm, which lives inside the digestive tract of vertebrates. Unlike earthworms, tapeworms do not have a complete digestive system. Instead, they absorb nutrients directly through their body surface from the host's intestine. This adaptation makes them extremely efficient parasites, but it also means they can deprive the host of essential nutrients, leading to health problems.
To summarize, organisms that we casually call "worms" can belong to very different biological groups and perform very different functions. Some, like earthworms, improve soil and support ecosystems. Others, such as certain nematodes and tapeworms, act as parasites and can cause harm. Therefore, when studying worms, it is essential to identify their specific group and ecological role rather than relying only on their general body shape.