



Science Fun!

What We Can Learn About Sharks?

1. There are over 350 species of sharks.

Sharks come in many shapes, sizes and colors. The largest shark in the world is the Whale Shark. There was a confirmed individual who had a length of 41 1/2 feet and a weight of more than 47,000 pounds. There are also unconfirmed reports of much larger whale sharks. The smallest shark is the Dwarf Lantern Shark which is about 4 to 8 inches long.

2. Sharks have rows of teeth!

Most sharks have at least four rows of teeth. They don't chew - they use their powerful teeth to bite and tear their food. As the first row of teeth in a shark gets worn out, the other rows of teeth move forward. New teeth are always forming.

3. Sharks do not have scales.

A shark has tough skin that is covered by dermal denticles which are small plates covered with enamel.

4. Sharks have a lateral line system along their sides.

A lateral line system detects movements in the water. This helps the shark find prey and navigate through the water at night or when visibility is poor. This system is made up of a network of fluid filled canals beneath the shark's skin. Pressure waves around the shark in the ocean water, vibrate this liquid which in turn is transmitted to jelly in the system. This jelly transmits to the shark's nerve endings and the message is relayed to the brain.



5. Do sharks sleep?

Sharks need to keep water moving over their gills to receive oxygen. Some sharks have spiracles which is a small opening behind their eyes that forces water across the shark's gills so the shark can be still when it rests. Other sharks, who do not have a spiracle, need to keep swimming constantly, so they have active and restful periods rather than sleep like we do. They seem to be "sleep swimming," having parts of their brain less active while they remain moving.

6. Are sharks a long lived species?

No one knows the true answer. It has been estimated that the whale shark can live up to 100 - 150 years and many of the smaller sharks live at least 20 to 30 years.

7. Sharks are not vicious "man-eaters".

A few shark species have doomed sharks in general to the idea that they are man-eaters. In fact, only 10 out of all the species are dangerous to humans. All sharks should be treated with respect though as they are predators. Humans do pose a danger to sharks too! Fishermen kill an estimated 30 million to 100 million sharks every year. About 75 shark species are in danger of becoming extinct.

8. Some sharks lay eggs and others give birth to their young.

Some shark species are oviparous - which means they lay eggs. Others are viviparous and give birth to live young.

9. Sharks are cartilaginous fish.

The structure of the shark's body is formed of cartilage instead of bone. Cartilage is a strong, flexible tissue.

10. Sharks have a keen sense of smell and hearing.

Sharks can identify much lower sounds than humans and some sharks can hear sounds more than 700 feet away. Sharks can also smell one drop of blood in a million drops of water.

