

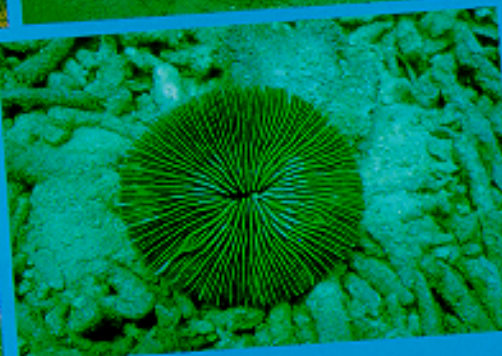
Among the different coral species found on the coral reef, the mushroom coral stands out because of its resemblance to an overturned mushroom cap. This coral is distinguished from the other types of corals because of its unique life history. The larva of the coral spends a short time swimming before settling on a hard surface. It then starts secreting a hard skeleton of limestone and grows vertically, producing a tubular structure. As growth continues, the top margin of the tube spreads out and the animal begins to look like a mushroom with a stalk and cap. As it grows, the cap is eventually detached from the stalk and it continues its life lying free on the seabed. Sometimes, a mushroom coral that is dying can produce a large number of little 'mushrooms'. These are usually found at the periphery of the dying coral. It is as if the coral is giving one last shot at perpetuating itself. A mushroom coral that is broken has the ability to regenerate the

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1. Young 'mushrooms' sprouting from a dead mushroom coral.
2. A mushroom coral showing signs of regeneration.
3. The resemblance to an overturned mushroom cap is clearly exhibited by this coral.
4. *Fungia paumotuensis* is one of the mushroom corals that are oval in shape.
5. *Helofungia actiniformis* - the mushroom coral that looks like a sea anemone.
6. An elongated mushroom coral of the genus *Herpolitha*.
7. *Padabackia crustacea* is an example of a mushroom coral that is attached.
8. A brilliantly coloured specimen of *Fungia*.

REEF MUSHROOMS

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