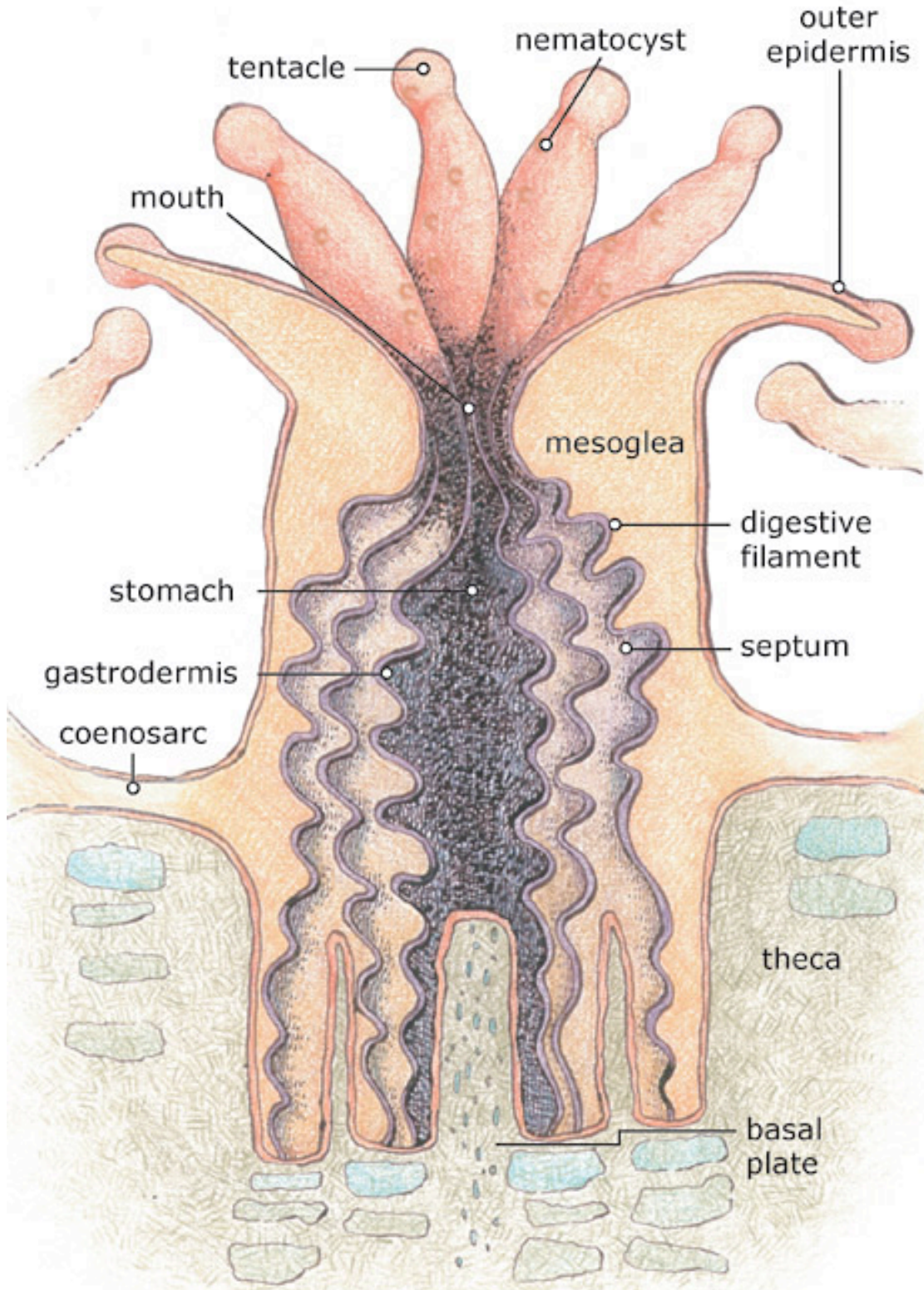




ANATOMY OF A CORAL POLYP

from NOAA Ocean Service Education



ANATOMY OF A CORAL POLYP:

Most reef-building corals are made up of hundreds of thousands of individual polyps like this one. These polyps generally range in size from one to three millimeters in diameter.

Anatomically, a polyp is a very simple organism. Much of its body consists of a stomach filled with digestive filaments. The polyp takes in food and expels waste through its mouth, the only opening.

A ring of tentacles surrounding the mouth aids in capturing food, expelling waste and clearing away debris. Most food is captured with the help of special stinging cells called nematocysts, which are inside the polyp's outer tissue, called the epidermis.

Calcium carbonate is secreted by reef-building polyps and forms a protective cup called a calyx within which the polyp sits. The base of the calyx upon which the polyp sits is called the basal plate. The walls surrounding the calyx are called the theca.

The coenosarc is a thin band of living tissue that connects individual polyps within a colony to one another.

To learn more about corals, visit NOAA Ocean Service Education on the web at:

<http://www.oceanservice.noaa.gov/education/kits/corals/welcome.html>



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