

Biopharm's Leech Facts

Did You Know...?

1. There are 650 known species of leeches.
2. The largest leech discovered measured 18 inches.
3. About one fifth of leech species live in the sea where they feed on fish.
4. The leech has 32 brains - 31 more than a human.
5. The Hirudo leech lays its babies within a cocoon; whereas the Amazon leech carries its babies on its stomach - sometimes as many as 300.



Leech cocoons on moss

6. Not all leeches are bloodsuckers. Many are predators, which eat earthworms, etc.
7. At Biopharm we mainly deal with the following species:-

HIRUDO MEDICINALIS/VERBENA
European Medicinal Leech

HIRUDINARIA MANILLENSIS
Asian Medicinal Leech

8. The Hirudo leech has three jaws with 100 teeth on each jaw - making 300 teeth in all.
9. The Amazon leech uses a different method of sucking blood. They insert a long proboscis into the victim as opposed to biting.
10. The bite of a leech is painless due to its own anaesthetic.



11. The Hirudo injects an anti-coagulant serum into the victim to prevent the blood clotting.12. The leech will gorge itself until it has had its fill and then just fall off.
13. The leech will gorge itself up to five times its body weight.



14. After the Hirudo leech drops off the wound it leaves will bleed, on average, for ten hours.
15. The first leech was used in medicine about 1000 B.C., probably in ancient India.
16. Wales was once one of the major leech collecting areas of Europe.

17. People would stand in the lakes and pools dotted around the country and when the leech attached to their legs they would put them in baskets and sell them. Today the Hirudo leech is an endangered species.

18. The original surgeons were barbers and they used leeches to cure anything from headaches to gout!

20. The barber pole is coloured now but originally barber - surgeons used to hang their bandages on a pole in front of the shop. Hence the red and white stripe of the pole.

21. HIRUDO MEDICINALIS/VERBENA is the leech mostly used in plastic and reconstructive surgery.

22. In plastic and reconstructive surgery BIOPHARM® LEECHES have helped to save the limbs of patients in 29 different countries.



23.

By extracting the anti-clotting serum from the leech researchers are isolating new pharmaceutical compounds for eventual treatment of heart diseases.

24. The nervous system of the leech is very similar to the human nervous system and is of enormous benefit to researchers in their quest for the answers to human problems.

25. The nearest relatives of leeches are earthworms.