

## UG CBCS Semester-1

### Phylum: Annelida

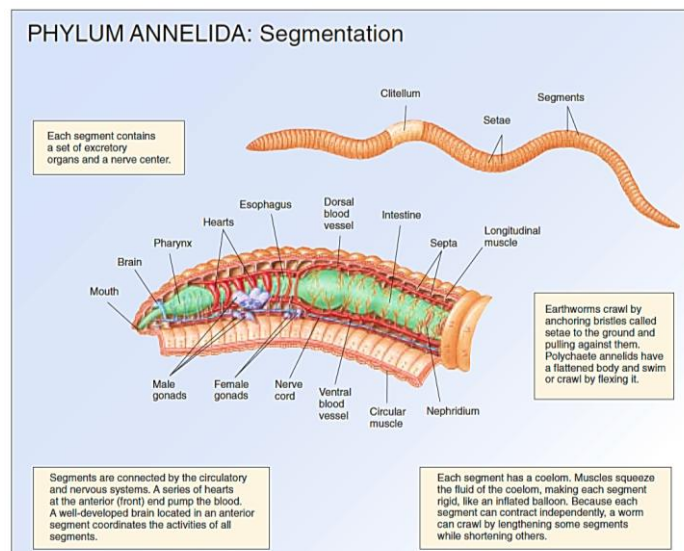
Annelids are a diverse group of coelomate animals characterized by serial segmentation. Each segment in the annelid body has its own circulatory, excretory, neural elements, and setae. A key transition in the animal body plan was *segmentation*, the building of a body from a series of similar segments. The first segmented animals to evolve were most likely **annelid worms**, phylum Annelida. One advantage of having a body built from repeated units (segments) is that the development and function of these units can be more precisely controlled, at the level of individual segments or groups of segments. For example, different segments may possess different combinations of organs or perform different functions relating to reproduction, feeding, locomotion, respiration, or excretion.



**FIGURE 45.11**  
A polychaete annelid, *Nereis virens* is a wide-ranging, predatory, marine polychaete worm equipped with feathery parapodia for movement and respiration, as well as jaws for hunting. You may have purchased *Nereis* as fishing bait!

Two-thirds of all annelids live in the sea (about 8000 species), and most of the rest, some 3100 species, are earthworms. Annelids are characterized by three principal features:

- 1. Repeated segments.** The body of an annelid worm is composed of a series of ring-like segments running the length of the body, looking like a stack of donuts or roll of coins. Internally, the segments are divided from one another by partitions called **septa**, just as bulkheads separate the segments of a submarine. In each of the cylindrical segments, the excretory and locomotor organs are repeated. The fluid within the coelom of each segment creates a hydrostatic (liquid-supported) skeleton that gives the segment rigidity, like an inflated balloon. Muscles within each segment push against the fluid in the coelom. Because each segment is separate, each can expand or contract independently. This lets the worm move in complex ways.
- 2. Specialized segments.** The anterior (front) segments of annelids have become modified to contain specialized sensory organs. Some are sensitive to light, and elaborate eyes with lenses and retinas have evolved in some annelids. A well-developed cerebral ganglion, or brain, is contained in one anterior segment.
- 3. Connections.** Although partitions separate the segments, materials and information do pass between segments. Annelids have a closed circulatory system that carries blood from one segment to another. A ventral nerve cord connects the nerve centers or ganglia in each segment with one another and the brain. These neural connections are critical features that allow the worm to function and behave as a unified and coordinated organism.



**FIGURE 45.12**  
The evolution of segmentation. Marine polychaetes and earthworms (phylum Annelida) were most likely the first organisms to evolve a body plan based on partly repeated body segments. Segments are separated internally from each other by septa.

## Body Plan of the Annelids

The basic annelid body plan is a tube within a tube, with the internal digestive tract—a tube running from mouth to anus—suspended within the coelom. The tube that makes up the digestive tract has several portions—the pharynx, esophagus, crop, gizzard, and intestine—that are specialized for different functions.

Annelids make use of their hydrostatic skeleton for locomotion. To move, annelids contract circular muscles running around each segment. Doing so squeezes the segment, causing the coelomic fluid to squirt outwards, like a tube of toothpaste. Because the fluid is trapped in the segment by the septa, instead of escaping like toothpaste, the fluid causes the segment to elongate and get much thinner. By then contracting longitudinal muscles that run along the length of the worm, the segment is returned to its original shape. In most annelid groups, each segment typically possesses **setae**, bristles of chitin that help anchor the worms during locomotion. By extending the setae in some segments so that they anchor in the substrate and retracting them in other segments, the worm can squirt its body, section by section, in either direction.

Unlike the arthropods and most mollusks, most annelids have a closed circulatory system. Annelids exchange oxygen and carbon dioxide with the environment through their body surfaces; most lack gills or lungs. However, much of their oxygen supply reaches the different parts of their bodies through their blood vessels. Some of these vessels at the anterior end of the worm body are enlarged and heavily muscular, serving as hearts that pump the blood. Earthworms have five pulsating blood vessels on each side that serve as hearts, helping to pump blood from the main dorsal vessel, which is their major pumping structure, to the main ventral vessel. The excretory system of annelids consists of ciliated, funnel-shaped nephridia generally similar to those of mollusks. These nephridia—each segment has a pair—collect waste products and transport them out of the body through the coelom by way of specialized excretory tubes.

## Classification

The roughly 12,000 described species of annelids occur in many different habitats. They range in length from as little as 0.5 millimeter to the more than 3-meter length of some polychaetes and giant Australian earthworms.

There are three classes of annelids:

1. **Polychaeta**, which are free-living, almost entirely marine bristleworms, comprising some 8000 species;
2. **Oligochaeta**, terrestrial earthworms and related marine and freshwater worms, with some 3100 species; and
3. **Hirudinea**, leeches, mainly freshwater predators or bloodsuckers, with about 500 species.

The annelids are believed to have evolved in the sea, with polychaetes being the most primitive class. Oligochaetes seem to have evolved from polychaetes, perhaps by way of brackish water to estuaries and then to streams. Leeches share with oligochaetes an organ called a **clitellum**, which secretes a cocoon specialized to receive the eggs. It is generally agreed that leeches evolved from oligochaetes, specializing in their bloodsucking lifestyle as external parasites.

### Class Polychaeta: The Polychaetes

Polychaetes (class Polychaeta) include clamworms, plume worms, scaleworms, lugworms, twin-fan worms, sea mice, peacock worms, and many others. These worms are often surprisingly beautiful, with unusual forms and sometimes iridescent colors. Polychaetes are often a crucial part of marine food chains, as they are extremely abundant in certain habitats. Some polychaetes live in tubes or permanent burrows of hardened mud, sand, mucus like secretions, or calcium carbonate. These sedentary polychaetes are primarily filter feeders, projecting a set of feathery tentacles from the tubes in which they live that sweep the water for food. Other polychaetes are active swimmers, crawlers, or burrowers. Many are active predators.



A Polychaete worm: *Nereis diversicolor*

Polychaetes have a well-developed head with specialized sense organs; they differ from other annelids in this respect. Their bodies are often highly organized into distinct regions formed by groups of segments related in function and structure. Their sense organs include eyes, which range from simple eyespots to quite large and conspicuous stalked eyes.

Another distinctive characteristic of polychaetes is the paired, fleshy, paddlelike flaps, called **parapodia**, on most of their segments. These parapodia, which bear bristlelike setae, are used in swimming, burrowing, or crawling. They also play an important role in gas exchange because they greatly increase the surface area of the body. Some polychaetes that live in burrows or tubes may have parapodia featuring hooks to help anchor the worm. Slow crawling is carried out by means of the parapodia. Rapid crawling and swimming is by undulating the body. In addition, the polychaete epidermis often includes ciliated cells which aid in respiration and food procurement.

The sexes of polychaetes are usually separate, and fertilization is often external, occurring in the water and away from both parents. Unlike other annelids, polychaetes usually lack permanent **gonads**, the sex organs that produce gametes. They produce their gametes directly from germ cells in the lining of the coelom or in their septa. Fertilization results in the production of ciliated, mobile *trochophore larvae* similar to the larvae of mollusks. The trochophores develop for long periods in the plankton before beginning to add segments and thus changing to a juvenile form that more closely resembles the adult form.

### Class Oligochaeta: The Earthworms

The body of an earthworm (class Oligochaeta) consists of 100 to 175 similar segments, with a mouth on the first and an anus on the last. Earthworms seem to eat their way through the soil because they suck in organic and other material by expanding their strong pharynx. Everything that they ingest passes through their long, straight digestive tracts. One region of this tract, the gizzard, grinds up the organic material with the help of soil particles.

The material that passes through an earthworm is deposited outside of its burrow in the form of castings that consist of irregular mounds at the opening of a burrow. In this way, earthworms aerate and enrich the soil. A worm can eat its own weight in soil every day.

In view of the underground lifestyle that earthworms have evolved, it is not surprising that they have no eyes. However, earthworms do have numerous light-, chemo-, and touch-sensitive cells, mostly concentrated in segments near each end of the body—those regions most likely

to encounter light or other stimuli. Earthworms have fewer setae than polychaetes and no parapodia or head region.

Earthworms are hermaphroditic, another way in which they differ from most polychaetes. When they mate, their anterior ends point in opposite directions, and their ventral surfaces touch. The *clitellum* is a thickened band on an earthworm's body; the mucus it secretes holds the worms together during copulation. Sperm cells are released from pores in specialized

segments of one partner into the sperm receptacles of the other, the process going in both directions simultaneously. Two or three days after the worms separate, the clitellum of each worm secretes a mucous cocoon, surrounded by a protective layer of chitin. As this sheath passes over the female pores of the body—a process that takes place as the worm moves—it receives eggs. As it subsequently passes along the body, it incorporates the sperm that were deposited during copulation. Fertilization of the eggs takes place within the cocoon. When the cocoon finally passes over the end of the worm, its ends pinch together. Within the cocoon, the fertilized eggs develop directly into young worms similar to adults.



**An Oligochaeta: The Earthworm**

### **Class Hirudinea: The Leeches**

Leeches (class Hirudinea) occur mostly in fresh water, although a few are marine and some tropical leeches occupy terrestrial habitats. Most leeches are 2 to 6 centimeters long, but one tropical species reaches up to 30 centimeters. Leeches are usually flattened dorsoventrally, like flatworms.

They are hermaphroditic, and develop a clitellum during the breeding season; cross-fertilization is obligatory as they are unable to self-fertilize. A leech's coelom is reduced and continuous throughout the body, not divided into individual

segments as in the polychaetes and oligochaetes. Leeches have evolved suckers at one or both ends of the body. Those that have suckers at both ends move by attaching first one and then the other end to the substrate, looping along. Many species are also capable of swimming. Except for one species, leeches have no setae. Some leeches have evolved the ability to suck blood from animals. Many freshwater leeches live as external parasites. They remain on their hosts for long periods and suck their blood from time to time.

The best-known leech is the medicinal leech, *Hirudo medicinalis*. Individuals of *Hirudo* are 10 to 12 centimeters long and have bladelike, chitinous jaws that rasp through the skin of the victim. The leech secretes an anticoagulant into the wound to prevent the blood from clotting as it flows out, and its powerful sucking muscles pump the blood out quickly once the hole has been opened. Leeches were used in medicine for hundreds of years to suck blood out of patients whose diseases were mistakenly believed to be caused by an excess of blood. Today, European pharmaceutical companies still raise and sell leeches, but they are used to remove excess blood after certain surgeries. Following the surgery, blood may accumulate because veins may function improperly and fail to circulate the blood. The accumulating blood “turns off” the arterial supply of fresh blood, and the tissue often dies. When leeches remove the excess blood, new capillaries form in about a week, and the tissues remain healthy.



**FIGURE 45.15**  
*Hirudo medicinalis*, the medicinal leech, is seen here feeding on a human arm. Leeches use chitinous, bladelike jaws to make an incision to access blood and secrete an anticoagulant to keep the blood from clotting. Both the anticoagulant and the leech itself have made important contributions to modern medicine.