



# Fungi

**Fungi are thread-like creatures that get their food from plants and animals.**

There may be as many as 250,000 different kinds (species) of moulds, mildews, rusts, yeasts and mushrooms in the world. All of these are **FUNGI**.

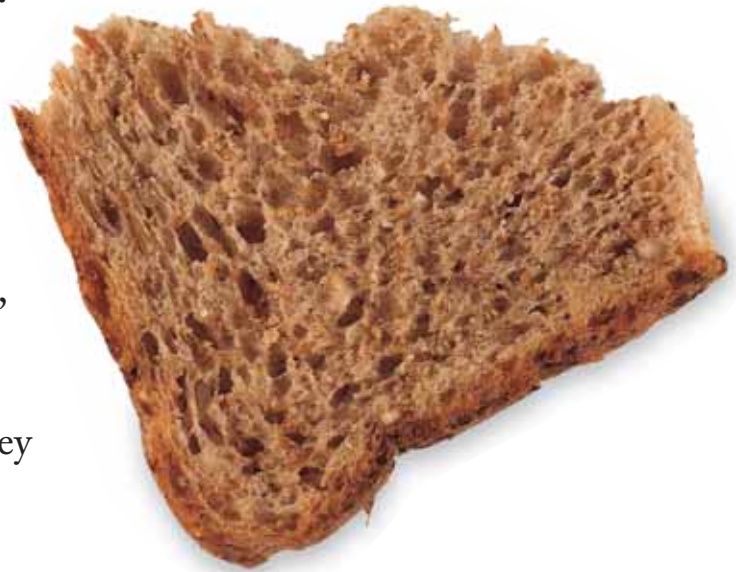
Although fungi look a bit like plants, they are not plants or animals, but a separate group of living things. Fungi are more complicated than bacteria. They can live in water, in the soil, and on almost any damp surface. They can live for hundreds of years. One species is among the oldest known living things.

## Fungi live in the damp

Fungi have no means of producing food for themselves, so they get it from dead plants and animals. This is easiest for them when the remains are damp. The fuzzy blue, grey and green patches of mould that develop on stale, damp bread are a common example (Picture 1).

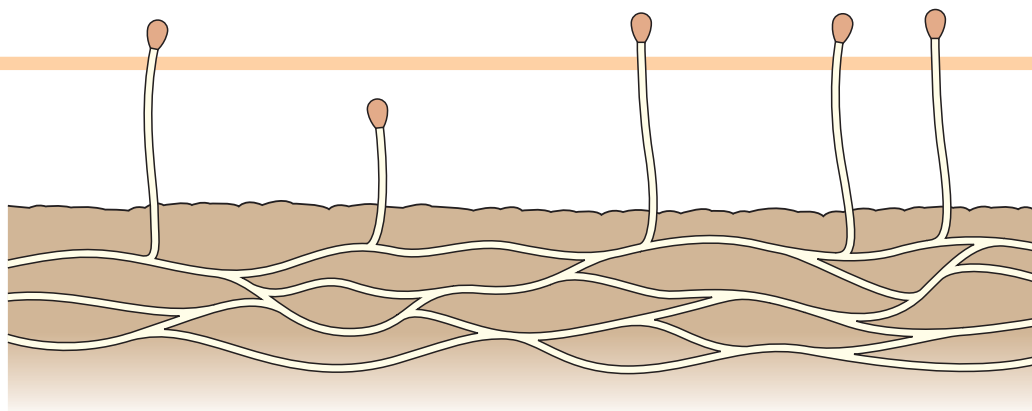
Fungi can also thrive on living tissue. Athlete's foot is an example of a fungus that thrives on humans. There are many others.

Some fungi, such as the yeast that makes bread dough rise, are very small and are made of only one cell.

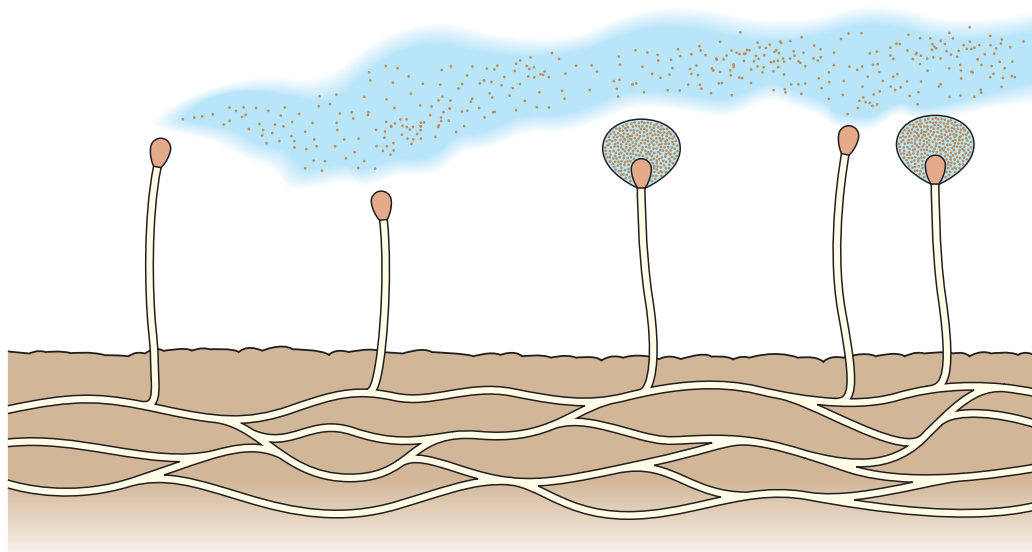


► (Picture 1) Mould developing on bread.

► (Picture 2) This is what mould looks like as it grows on bread. It sends out many fibres just below the surface.



► (Picture 3) When the 'fruits' of the fungus burst, they send out a cloud of tiny spores (seeds) which are easily carried by the air.



## Moulds

Moulds have long, branching cells that look like tangled hairs (Pictures 2 and 3).

Moulds can be both harmful and helpful to people. Moulds can destroy crops during a damp summer. Yet moulds also help break down dead leaves and make humus for soil, and they make substances that can be used to prevent disease.

*Penicillium* is a green mould which stops the growth of bacteria. It was used to make one of the first **ANTIBIOTICS** (called penicillin).

## How fungi multiply

A fungus breeds by sending out spores. Most fungi are found in the damp, warm conditions of the soil. Fungi can also live together with algae. When this happens they form lichen.

Some fungi are **PARASITES**, which grow on and feed off living things. These are the fungi that mainly cause disease and death. Most commonly, fungi attack plants, but they can also attack animals, including people.

### Summary

- Fungi include moulds and yeast.
- Some fungi are useful to us, but others can cause disease.