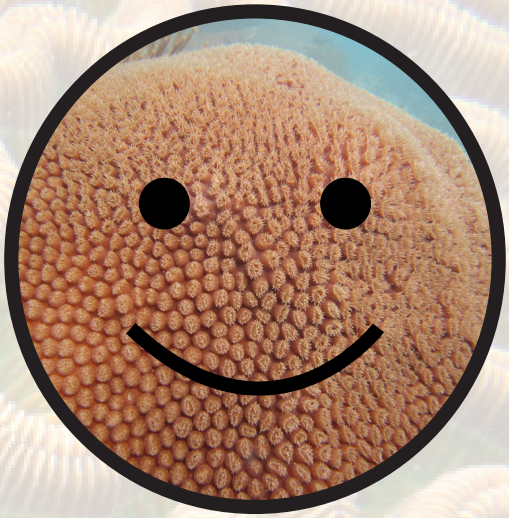
Keeping Coral Healthy

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Biscayne National Park
Dry Tortugas National Park
Everglades National Park

Healthy coral = happy coral



- Corals are animals that live together in big groups called colonies.
- Corals need clean, clear water to stay healthy.
- Hard coral colonies build coral reefs.
- Coral reefs provide food and homes for fish and other sea life.
- Coral reefs protect our coasts from storm surges and provide us food.

Corals can get sick or injured like people.

- Corals can't run away from danger since they are stuck in place.
- Increasingly, corals are dying from human-caused issues, such as disease and coral bleaching, which can happen due to underwater heat waves.
- Without corals, there would be no coral reefs.

You can help keep them safe!

Florida's Coral Reef in South Florida National Parks

South Florida's National Parks protect many threatened ecosystems, including parts of Florida's Coral Reef—North America's only coral reef. This reef is experiencing an outbreak of Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease. This disease is widespread and has a high mortality rate for around half of reef-building coral species. You can help by supporting coral reef restoration programs and by following the advice on the back of this sheet.

Use the QR code to find out more or go to go.nps.gov/SCTLD.

Photo credits: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission- page background, healthy coral, and unhealthy coral; Florida Center for Instructional Technology- coral bullets; National Park Service - Florida's Coral Reef

Real ways you can help corals stay healthy

Recreate responsibly

A snorkeler recreating responsibly

Hands (and feet) off! Coral is delicate and injuries take a long time to heal. Be careful not to touch, stand on, or kick coral when snorkeling or diving. Coral is protected in national parks and collecting it is illegal.

"Leave no trace" in the ocean. Chemicals from products we use, even those we put on our own bodies, can hurt corals. Use mineral-based, reef-safe sunscreens. Trash hurts all marine life so be sure to "pack it out."

Prevent the spread of coral disease. Corals can get sick and die from bacteria and viruses, which spread through water and by touch. Slow the spread of coral diseases, such as Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease, by disinfecting your snorkel and dive gear between sites.

Be a responsible boater

Boats tied to mooring balls at a coral reef

Stay clear of coral reefs. Corals that take hundreds of years to grow can be severely damaged in seconds by anchors or boats running into them. Plan your trip and use up-to-date charts and GPS software. Use mooring balls where available or anchor well away from coral. Never leave anchors, chain, or line behind as these can still damage coral on their own.

Follow all fishing, diving, and anchoring rules. These rules protect sensitive areas and enhance your visitor experience by giving marine life safe places to rest, feed, and reproduce.

Follow clean boating principles. Human waste and trash are bad for corals. Dispose of trash properly and use pump out stations instead of dumping waste into the ocean. Bilge water can pollute reefs with gas and oil, and spread invasive species and marine diseases, so use a bilge sock to soak it up.

Take care of coral reefs from home

School of reef fish at Biscayne National Park

Lower your carbon footprint. Increased carbon in the atmosphere causes rising ocean temperatures, which lead to coral bleaching; and ocean acidification, which dissolves coral skeletons. Switch to energy efficient products at home and support initiatives to reduce global carbon emissions.

Eat sustainable seafood. Fish are important parts of coral reef ecosystems and they help keep corals healthy. Make sustainable seafood choices, which prevent overfishing of species in ways that cause little harm to habitats and other marine life.

Dispose of waste properly. All flowing water eventually makes its way to the ocean. Corals need clear water, so land-based sources of pollution like human waste, fertilizers, and sediment can stress corals. Apply fertilizers and pesticides sparingly. Support tertiary wastewater treatment initiatives so human waste stays off the reef. Promote low-impact development and green infrastructure to reduce runoff in coastal areas.

Photo credits: Florida Department of Environmental Protection- page background; Shaun Verne- boats at reef; National Park Service- snorkeler and fish at reef