

SUPER SLOTHS

Sloths have a reputation of being very adorable, slow, and lazy animals of Central and South America. What makes sloths such fascinating creatures?

What is a Sloth?

Have you ever been so tired you slept for 20 hours, or hung upside-down in a tree? This is what the life of a sloth is like every day.

Sloths are **tropical mammals**, or warm-blooded animals that live in tropical (hot and moist all year) regions. There are two types of sloths: the two-toed or three-toed. Both actually have three toes on their back feet, but the two-toed sloth has only two fingers and claws on its front feet. Otherwise, these sloths are very similar. Let's explore this lazy mammal.

Made for Trees

Sloths love trees so much that they leave them only once a week, to use the bathroom, and they sleep curled up or hanging upside-down.

With long brown fur, long curved toe claws, and even longer arms, they look kind of like monkeys. It's these long limbs and claws that help sloths live in trees - their long toe claws hook onto branches, and their long arms can wrap around tree trunks for climbing or resting. Of course, if they have to fight, sloths use these claws to protect themselves, too.

When you're cold, you might jump around to stay warm, but sloths are too weak. Their fur acts like a thick winter coat. And because sloths move so slowly in the moist tropical air, algae, a green plant, often grows on their fur. This helps them **camouflage**, or blend into their surroundings, to remain hidden from enemies.

Life in the Slow Lane

Who would win in a race, a tortoise or a sloth? For once, the tortoise would win. Sloths move less than 10 feet a minute while up in the trees, and they're even slower on the ground. That makes them the slowest land mammal!

A sloth can sleep up to 20 hours a day, but usually sleeps about nine, and it can take them over an hour to eat a meal!

Plant Eaters

Since most animals could outrun sloths, it's a good thing they're **herbivores**, meaning they enjoy plants, leaves, and fruits. It's unusual, but some two-toed sloths eat small birds, reptiles, or insects.

Like everything else, sloths digest food slowly - over a month to digest a meal. Because the plants they eat are hard to digest, their stomachs have four separate sections to break down food. Plant food doesn't provide much nutrition either. This could be one of the reasons sloths are so slow.

QUICK FACTS:

Diet: berries, twigs, fruit and leaves; sometimes insects.

How do sloths live? Usually alone. Sometimes more than one female live in the same tree.

Interesting fact: Sloths are good swimmers!

How many babies do they have? One baby at a time.

How long does the average sloth live? 27 years in the wild.

