

How Butterflies Grow

Genre: Nonfiction **Reading Level:** 490L

Butterflies go through an amazing transformation during their lives. This process is called metamorphosis, and it has four distinct stages that can take anywhere from a few weeks to several months.

The first stage begins when a female butterfly lays tiny eggs on a leaf. She carefully chooses plants that will provide food for her babies. Each egg is smaller than a pinhead, but it contains everything needed to start a new life.

In the second stage, a caterpillar hatches from the egg. The caterpillar's main job is to eat. It munches on leaves constantly, growing bigger and bigger. As it grows, the caterpillar sheds its skin several times because the old skin becomes too tight.

The third stage is perhaps the most mysterious. The caterpillar forms a hard shell called a chrysalis around its body. Inside this protective covering, the caterpillar's body completely reorganizes itself. Wings, legs, and antennae develop during this resting period.

Finally, in the fourth stage, an adult butterfly emerges from the chrysalis. At first, its wings are wet and crumpled. The butterfly must pump fluid into its wings and wait for them to dry before it can fly away and begin the cycle again.