

Butterfly Life Cycle

Butterflies have a complete life cycle with four separate stages. During this cycle they change completely - this is called metamorphosis.



What Happens During the First Stage?

During the first stage of the butterfly life cycle, the female butterfly lays her eggs on a leaf, stem or another object. The new butterfly starts life as a very small egg. The eggs can be round or oval and some are ribbed. If you look really closely, you can actually see the caterpillar growing inside the egg.



What Happens During the Second Stage?

During the second stage, a caterpillar (or larva) hatches. It is the long, worm-like stage of the butterfly life cycle. Most caterpillars have interesting patterns, stripes or patches and sometimes spine-like hairs. In this stage, the caterpillar needs to eat lots to grow and will usually start by eating the leaf they were born onto. As it gets bigger, the caterpillar sheds its skin four or more times.



What Happens During the Third Stage?

Once fully grown, the caterpillar forms a chrysalis (or pupa), which is usually brown or green so it is camouflaged. Many hibernate (spend long periods asleep) during the winter at this stage. This is the transformation stage, when the caterpillar tissues are broken down and the adult's insect structures are formed, including growing wings. From the outside, it can look like it is just resting but it is changing rapidly inside the pupa.



What Happens During the Fourth Stage?

During the fourth stage, the pupa splits open to reveal a colourful adult butterfly, which the caterpillar has transformed into. When it first emerges, its wings are soft and folded against its body because it had to fit inside the pupa. The butterfly usually learns to fly in 3 or 4 hours. Adults also mate and the female butterflies lay eggs, beginning the life cycle again.

Butterfly Life Cycle Questions

1. Fill in the missing words.

Butterflies have a complete life _____ with _____ separate stages.

2. Find and copy one word that means 'apart'.

3. What does the new butterfly start life as? Tick one

- a caterpillar
- a small butterfly
- a very small egg
- a chrysalis

4. Draw **four** lines and complete each sentence.

The new butterfly...	(or larva) hatches.
Once fully grown, the caterpillar forms...	a chrysalis (or pupa) which is usually brown or green so it is camouflaged.
During the second stage, a caterpillar...	starts life as a very small egg.
The adults also mate and the female butterflies...	lay eggs, beginning the life cycle again.

5. Number the events from **1-5** to show the order in which they occur in the four separate stages. The first one has been done for you.

	Most caterpillars have interesting patterns, stripes or patches and sometimes spine-like hairs.
	This is the transformation stage, when the caterpillar tissues are broken down and the adult's insect structures are formed, including growing wings.
1	The eggs can be round or oval and some are ribbed.
	The butterfly usually learns to fly in 3 or 4 hours.
	Once fully grown, the caterpillar forms a chrysalis (or pupa), which is usually brown or green so it is camouflaged.

Butterfly Life Cycle Questions

6. What does the caterpillar need to do in the second stage to grow? Tick one.

- grow wings
- learn to fly
- lay eggs
- eat lots

7. Summarise what you have learnt about the butterfly life cycle using 25 words or fewer.
