

TUSHMA COIN

- ▶ **Height:** 1in
- ▶ **Classification:** Fungus
- ▶ **Substrate:** Living flesh



The tushma coin is a carnivorous fungus that belongs to the Sceptis Order. It parasitises most of the tushma Order and can infect other species too.

Physiology

Tushma coins are the fruiting bodies of a species of fungus that grows mostly on tushma, a taxonomic Order of marine animal. The distinctive fruiting bodies, which are shallow cup-shaped and usually an orange-red colour, grow to a diameter of around 3 inches.

Reproduction

As tushma spend much of their time in large groups where they bask and hunt together, an infected tushma presents this fungus with many opportunities to infect new animals. If the spores from an infected individual land in an open wound in another, the fungus has a moderately high chance of establishing itself. It feeds on the animal's subdermal fat, and its mushrooms break through to the surface of the skin to spread its spores.

The risk is lower if the tushma are swimming together underwater but not eliminated completely, as the spores can drift in the current.

The mushrooms eventually dry and drop off the animal, and should be considered an infection risk, including to non-tushma.

Medical Conditions

The tushma coin fungus has no known diseases or parasites, but it is a notorious parasite itself which infects the wounds of affected animals. While it is known - and named - for infecting tushma, it can affect other species too.

Infected individuals usually feel pain in the affected area that starts as dull and weak, but can intensify over a span of 3-4 months to become intensely painful. Affected individuals have classed the end-stage pain as anything between an achy itch of 3/10 intensity to an intensity of debilitating pain at 10/10.

The fungus spreads through the infected individual's body fat and is impossible to see during this time. The extent of the itch is an unreliable indicator of how extensive the mushroom growth will be. When the fungus is ready to produce spores, cup-shaped mushrooms grow through the skin.

While an infection can be debilitating and therefore potentially lethal, if the infected can survive until the fungus has produced its mushrooms, and those mushrooms have withered and dropped off, then they can recover, as the fungus dies after this.



Geographical Distribution



This fungus grows only on living flesh, usually on wounded tushma, which often sustain minor injuries due to the delicate nature of their skin. It can infect other species. However, it only grows on species that live in tropical areas, including the marine and aquatic environments of South Oplayn and Wesserty and the Evallie chain.

Populations

The tushma coin fungus only grows where there are suitable animals, and where those animals are sustaining injuries with a fairly high level of regularity. Established tushma beaches are notorious as breeding grounds for this fungus due to their sociability, status as a prey animal, and delicate skin.

Position in Ecosystem

This is a parasitic fungus which can, although does not always, kill its host. Most species who interact with tushma are at risk, so aside from tushma it's most commonly seen in predator species.

Apex Predators

Apex predators are the most likely non-tushma animals to catch the tushma coin fungus if they hunt tushma.

Tushma

The most common host animal of this fungus due to their skin being very delicate and prone to minor injuries such as scratches.

Technology

A few notes about the intersection between technology and the tushma coin fungus can be found [here](#).

Agriculture

Far from being a potential source of food, most mesolithics, off-worlders, and non-sapient animals avoid tushma coins and would be extremely unlikely to eat one.

Energy Usage

This fungus draws its energy from the flesh of its host. As it is a short-lived fungus this will only happen for a few months, but most survivors of an infection are reluctant to risk re-infection.

Sanitation

If exposure to this fungus is suspected, the individual is encouraged to thoroughly wash the wound.

Tushma are particularly at risk due to their habit of basking for long periods of time in large groups, often with lots of physical contact, including with infected individuals, and remaining out of the water for sustained periods. In such an environment, infection has time to take hold.

History

There is little to say of tushma coin fungus history. While the fungus is unpleasant and there is a great likelihood that it has generated deadly epidemics in some communities - pinno' grath are among the most likely to be infected by eating an infected tushma, and they must remain in top condition to hunt - these have not been recorded.

Evolution / Genesis

It is unknown how long ago this fungus emerged as an infection risk.

Culture

There is little about the tushma coin fungus that is uplifting, and this is reflected in how they are shunned in the overall cultures of Kaleida's mesolithics. They evoke disgust and horror, so they tend not to show up in art unless to evoke these feelings.

Food

Tushma coins are emphatically not a food item. It is not known whether or not they are safe to eat, but even in a survival situation it is very unlikely anybody is likely to try them.

Their primary host-animal, tushma, are safe for some species to eat (though poisonous to others), but tushma carcasses should be checked thoroughly for signs of infection before preparing to eat.

Art

The grim facts about tushma coins mean they are seldom represented in art.

Politics

The tushma coin fungus is understood by the leaders of the various communities of Kaleida to be a debilitating infection which can affect individuals' chances of survival and invariably impact their short-to-mid-term wellbeing. For this reason, those who are in a leadership position do what they can to avoid introducing it to their communities.

Utopian / Dystopian Qualities

This is a decidedly grim fungus, although it is not intended to make Kaleida a dystopia. While Kaleida is designed to be utopian for visitors, it is understood that the ecosystem must include predatory, parasitic, poisonous, and venomous creatures in order to be portrayed as plausible, and that there must be death for there to be life. This is not an uplifting fact, so can be read as detracting from the utopian qualities of the planet.

Ultimately, Kaleida is intended to be plausible, more so than it is meant to be utopian, so as such the tushma coin fungus has a valid place in its ecosystem, albeit a minor one.

Economy

Tushma coins certainly are not a desirable item. It could be argued that most Kaleidans would pay to keep it at bay. Unfortunately there is no effective treatment, and affected individuals are best quarantined and provided with the best possible care from a distance in the hope that they survive.

Education

Pinno' grath communities usually educate their younger members to observe tushma populations for signs of tushma coin infection. If all the tushma in a given area are clear, they are considered safe to eat.

Healthcare and Medicine

Tushma coin is not a medicine in any form.

Treatment of tushma coin infection includes putting the individual into quarantine until the mushrooms have sprouted and the last has fallen off. They are not to be touched, but if they must be, then a helper must be chosen who has no open wounds, and must bathe themselves after contact. This is well understood by most healers.

This rather miserable process means that empathetic healers tend to do their best to provide a sense of care from a distance, so ineffective but kindly 'treatments' include:

- Fragrant leaves and resins being prepared to smudge the infected
- Medicinal salves, juices, and teas made from plants and other mushrooms
- Spoken benedictions, rhymes, and charms
- Time to talk with elders or other individuals recognised for their wisdom

Food is provided to the affected, and if possible, the community cooperates to prevent the infected individual from being predated. This can be difficult, as individuals are usually quarantined in a place where the dead mushrooms will not drop in a chamber that is later to be used by the community.

Credits

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~Hayley, The Character Consultancy