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In the vast expanse of the world's oceans, an intriguing relationship exists between large marine mammals—whales—and tiny crustaceans known as barnacles. While it might seem counterintuitive, barnacles commonly attach themselves to the skin of whales, creating a fascinating example of symbiosis in the marine environment. Despite their persistent presence on these giants of the sea, barnacles generally do not hinder the whale's ability to thrive and succeed. Understanding this relationship reveals insights into marine ecology, adaptation, and the resilient nature of whales.

What Are Barnacles and Why Do They Attach to Whales?

Barnacles are small, sessile crustaceans that belong to the subclass Cirripedia. These creatures are known for their hardy shells and specialized lifestyle, attaching firmly to various surfaces, including rocks, ships, and animals like whales. When barnacles settle on whales, they often choose parts of the body that are frequently in contact with the water, such as the head, flippers, and tail.

The Process of Barnacle Attachment

- **Larval Settlement:** Barnacle larvae, called nauplii, drift with ocean currents until they find a suitable surface.
- **Adhesion:** The larvae settle and secrete a cement-like substance that firmly attaches them to the whale's skin.