

QUALITY OF LIFE SCALE

The decision regarding the euthanasia of a beloved pet may be the most difficult decision you make in your entire life and the consequences are irrevocable. Whatever the decision is, it should be one that you can always look back upon and know that you would make the same decision over again in the same situation. So how do you know if it is time? There are several criteria used in evaluating life quality and you should consider them carefully.

- Is your pet eating? Basically, quality of life involves eating or at least interest in food. An animal that is hungry has vitality that must be considered, though this is not the only consideration.

- Is your pet comfortable? The pet should be free of debilitating pains, cramps, aches or even the psychological pain that comes, for example, from the development of incontinence in an animal that has been housebroken for an entire life.

- Does the pet still enjoy favorite activities? The elderly pet does not necessarily need to continue chasing balls or jumping after Frisbees but he should enjoy sleeping comfortably in his or her favorite resting spots, the company of family, etc. You know your pet better than anyone and only you can truly answer these questions.

If you are considering euthanasia, discuss the pet's condition with your veterinarian prior to making a decision or even coming in for an appointment. Every veterinarian has a story or two about the pet that was brought in for euthanasia but turned out to have a relatively simple problem and ultimately achieved a complete recovery. The mental process of making the euthanasia decision is heart breaking and you do not want to have to undergo this process twice. On the other hand, you do not want to euthanize a pet with a treatable disease. Many times people come in for their euthanasia appointment having already made their decision when, in fact, their pet has a reversible problem.

Should you be present?

Again, this is a very personal decision. On the one hand, you probably do not want your pet to be alone with strangers in the final moments but on the other hand, you may not be up to watching your pet's death. Every owner wants to think of euthanasia as a gentle slipping into death, much like falling asleep. In reality, the pet will not close his eyes, and there may be twitching, some gasping last breaths, or even urination or defecation. To help ease this transition

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between life and death, sometimes a tranquilizer is given to alleviate some of the above, but you should keep in mind that this may not be how you want to remember your pet. The issue of children present is also a personal one and the above information should be considered there as well.

How is the procedure performed?

We will prepare and have you sign a euthanasia form giving us consent to perform the euthanasia and also recording whether you prefer cremation for your pet or burial at home. If you want your pet's ashes returned to you you'll need to choose an urn or container for them. We will usually also ask if you would like a lock of hair or your pet's collar as a keepsake.

If a sedative is to be used, it is given first so that the remainder of the procedure can be done without struggling. Sometimes an intravenous catheter will be placed. This takes a few minutes. The intravenous catheter serves several purposes. First, the euthanasia solution is painful if administered outside the vein. The catheter ensures clean access to the vein, even if the owner is holding the pet. The catheter also allows for a sedative to be administered prior to the euthanasia solution. After the catheter is placed, the pet rejoins the owner in the exam room. The owner may spend some last time alone with the pet if desired. For a quiet animal with adequate veins (not too dehydrated and with good blood pressure) a catheter may not be needed.

The euthanasia itself is very fast. The euthanasia solution, generally dyed a bright color so that it cannot be mistaken for anything else, is delivered over 10-30 seconds and death comes peacefully within a few minutes. Euthanasia solution is an overdose of anesthetic, so the pet will fall asleep. Then it takes a couple minutes for the heart and breathing to stop.

The owner is allowed to remain with the pet for final private goodbyes. When ready, the owner may simply exit the room and the hospital staff takes over.

What happens to my pet afterwards?

- 1) Your pet's remains can be a part of a general cremation in which the ashes will not be returned to you.
- 2) If you wish, you may have a private cremation and the ashes will be returned to you either in an urn of your choosing or a white plastic box (the basic option).
- 3) Private services can sometimes be arranged through local providers.
- 4) Many city ordinances prohibit the burial of a pet's body at home, so check what is legal in your area. If you choose to bury your pet at home make sure the hole is deep enough to prevent any wild animals from digging your pet back up.

Autopsy (called necropsy for animals) is available and is compatible with any of the options listed above. There are different levels of details for this procedure. Usually the doctor will have discussed necropsy with you and you can decide together whether you'd like this done. If we know what was wrong with the pet most clients choose not to have this done, but if we need to know

what was wrong to keep other pets in the household safe (by determining if the problem the pet had was contagious), or we want to get some closure and to know that we made the right decision, a necropsy is recommended. Sometimes the veterinarian requests the necropsy out of desire to get answers that might help with similar cases in the future. Cases where an animal may have been killed or deliberately harmed would also need a necropsy. If you have unanswered questions or a legal interest in these results, please discuss the details with your veterinarian.

Dr. Alice Villalobos, the veterinarian who started Pawspice, a quality of life program for terminal pets, has published a scoring system for life quality.

Quality of Life Scale

Score	Criterion
H 0-10:	<u>Hurt</u> : Adequate pain control, including breathing ability, is first and foremost on the scale. Is the pet's pain successfully managed? Is Oxygen necessary?
H 0-10:	<u>Hunger</u> : Is the pet eating enough? Does hand feeding help? Does the patient require a feeding tube?
H 0-10:	<u>Hydration</u> : Is the patient dehydrated? For patients not drinking enough, use subcutaneous fluids once or twice daily to supplement fluid intake.
H 0-10:	<u>Hygiene</u> : The patient should be kept brushed and cleaned, particularly after elimination, avoid pressure sores and keep all wounds clean
H 0-10:	<u>Happiness</u> : Does the pet express joy and interest? Is he responsive to things around him (family, toys, etc?) Is the pet depressed, lonely, anxious, bored, or afraid? Can the pet's bed be close to the family activities and not be isolated?
H 0-10:	<u>Mobility</u> : Can the patient get up without assistance? Does the pet need human or mechanical help (e.g. a cart?) Does he feel like going for a walk? Is he having seizures or stumbling? (some caregivers feel that euthanasia is preferable to amputation, yet a animal who has limited mobility but is still alert and responsive can have a good quality of life as long as his caregivers and committed to helping him)
H 0-10:	<u>More good days than bad</u> : When bad days outnumber good days, quality of life might be too compromised. When a healthy human-animal bond is no longer possible, the caregiver must be made aware the end is near. The decision needs to be made if the pet is suffering. If death comes peacefully and painlessly, that is okay.
Total:	*A total >35 points is acceptable for a good Pawspice