

# *End of Life Considerations*

As our pets age or develop serious disease, we become faced with the obligation to make the best, most compassionate decisions on their behalf. Please retain this information for your reference and call us as needed.

## *Quality of Life/When is it “time”?*

Assessing quality of life factors can help you to decide when the most loving thing that you can do is help your beloved pet pass away peacefully. There are a few key indicators to consider:

1. Does your pet still engage in activities that s/he used to love?
2. Does your pet respond to affection in the usual way?
3. Does the pain or suffering outweigh the enjoyment in life?
4. Can we improve your pet’s condition or is it terminal?
5. Does your family agree on the answers to the above questions?

Quality of Life Scale	
Answer each question with a number 1-10, 10 being great/normal	
Score	Criterion
	<b>Hurt:</b> Is your pet’s pain successfully managed? Does your pet need oxygen therapy?
	<b>Hunger:</b> Is your pet eating enough? Does hand feeding help?
	<b>Hydration:</b> Is your pet dehydrated? Does your pet need subcutaneous fluid daily?
	<b>Hygiene:</b> Are you able to keep your pet clean and brushed?
	<b>Happiness:</b> Does your pet express joy or interest regarding family, toys, etc.? Is your pet depressed, anxious, bored, or afraid?
	<b>Mobility:</b> Can your pet get up without assistance? Does your pet want to do normal activity (go for a walk)? Is your pet having seizures or stumbling?
	<b>More good days than bad:</b> When bad days outnumber good days, quality of life might be compromised.
	<b>Total:</b> A total greater than 35 can represent an acceptable quality of life

Adaptation from Villalobos, A.E, *Quality of Life Scale Helps Make Final Call*

## *Counselling Resources*

- Pet Loss Support Group Every Monday @ 7:00 p.m. @ AHS Golden Valley Conference Room D
- University of Minnesota Veterinary Social Services: 612-624-4747
- Pet Loss Support Hotlines: 800-565-1526, 888-332-7738, 877-394-2273

## *Websites*

- [www.petloss.com](http://www.petloss.com)
- [www.pet-loss.net](http://www.pet-loss.net)
- [www.aplb.org](http://www.aplb.org)

## *Books for Adults*

- *Final Farewell: Preparing for and Mourning the Loss of Your Pet* By Marty Tousley and Katherine Heuerman
- *Healing the Pain of Pet Loss: Letters in Memorium* edited by Kymberly Smith, The Charles Press.
- *Absent Friend: Coping with the Loss of a Treasured Friend* by Laura and Martyn Lee

## *Books for Children*

- *For Every dog an Angel* by Christine Davis
- *For Every cat an Angel* by Christine Davis
- *I'll Always Love You* by Hans Wilhelm

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## ***What is Euthanasia?***

Euthanasia is the act of helping your pet pass away painlessly. This is achieved by a Veterinarian injecting an overdose of an anesthetic agent into your pet's vein. Your pet becomes unconscious and the heart stops. This procedure is very quick and the patient may pass away before all of the injection has been given.

Depending on your pet's situation, the procedure may go more smoothly if we place a catheter in the vein before giving the injection. Placing a catheter takes some additional time, but allows us to administer the euthanasia solution without restraint or a needle poke in front of you. Some patients or guardians also feel more comfortable if the pet is first given a sedative injection.

## ***Who should be present?***

Not everyone is comfortable witnessing a beloved pet die. There is no shame in this. However, if you are comfortable staying with your pet, then we welcome you to do so.

It may be helpful to understand what death looks like before you decide what is best for you. In most cases of euthanasia, the pet quickly becomes limp and stops breathing. Animals do not close their eyes when they die. Rarely, there may be what appears to be a breath or some muscle twitches. These are purely reflexes and not a conscious activity of the pet. In some cases, pets that are very dehydrated and weak may have weak veins as well. In these cases, we may have to use more than one vein to administer the euthanasia solution.

## ***Care of Remains***

Cremation is the most common way that we take care of the remains. We use a service called VHA, which has been performing cremation in the Twin Cities since 1984. If you choose to have your pet's ashes returned to you, you may choose an urn or a simple box if you plan to spread or bury the ashes. Ashes can take up 2 weeks to return to the clinic for pick-up.

Some people find mementos to be meaningful, such as a clay paw print or a clipping of fur. We can facilitate that for you after euthanasia. If you have a pet cemetery plot, then you are more than welcome to take your pet with you.

## ***Alternative ideas for remains***

- The Furever Tree Eco-Urn ([www.thecollarproject.org/furever-tree-eco-urn](http://www.thecollarproject.org/furever-tree-eco-urn))
- Timberland Urns ([www.timberlandurns.com](http://www.timberlandurns.com))
- Cremation Jewelry