

# Preparing to Say Goodbye to Your Pet:

## Answers to Commonly Asked Questions About Euthanasia



### How will I know when it is the 'right time' to say goodbye to my pet?

This is never an easy decision. However, there are some signs that can help you decide when the time has come. It is important to work with your veterinarian to fully understand the disease or injury that is responsible for your pet's ailing condition. The following are some questions to consider asking your veterinarian:

- Do I have all the information about my pet's condition?
- Are there other options for treatment or care such as a specialist or referral institution?
- Does my pet have any chance to recover, improve or at least maintain a good quality of life?
- How is the disease/injury likely to progress?
- How much time does my pet have to live a good quality of life while coping with this illness or injury?

### How can my family and I best prepare to say goodbye?

Take the time to prepare questions, consider everyone's feelings, and determine who would like to be involved in planning. Discuss and contemplate several factors surrounding the euthanasia such as:

Which veterinarian would I like to perform the euthanasia?  
Who in my family would like to be present, if anyone? If they can not be present in person, how can I include them in saying goodbye?  
What aftercare options are available for my pet? Can I decide on aftercare and memory keepsakes prior to the day of euthanasia?



### What will happen during the euthanasia of my pet?

Euthanasia is a term meaning 'good death'. It is such a difficult decision for the family but ultimately, it is a gentle humane way to relieve pain and suffering in our beloved pets. Your veterinarian will prepare a specific protocol to ensure your pet is as comfortable as possible.

Your pet may be given a sedative prior to the veterinarian or veterinary technician placing an intravenous catheter into the leg vein. Your veterinarian will then give your pet an intravenous injection of a high dose of barbituate. The passing is gentle and peaceful, occurring within seconds after the injection is administered. The veterinarian will confirm that your pet has passed away by listening to his/her heart with a stethoscope. Even after death, you may notice your pet twitch, gasp, urinate and/or defecate. These are normal releases after a body has expired. Your pet's eyes may remain open after death.

### Are there any resources to help me cope with the grieving process?

The bond between you and your pet is very special and grieving is a normal reaction to loss or anticipated loss. There are many services and resources available to support you and your family through the grieving process. There are pet loss support lines, support groups, excellent books and professional grief counselors who specialize in pet bereavement. For example, The Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement ([www.aplb.org](http://www.aplb.org)) is a nonprofit association of concerned and professionally trained volunteers. They offer on-line resources and chat groups for anticipatory bereavement and pet loss. It is important to remember, you are not alone; do not hesitate to seek support during this difficult time.



### How can I tell if my pet still has a good quality of life?

Generally, you can assess quality of life based on your perception of changes in the following: Attitude, Appetite and Activity.

**Attitude** - Does my pet still enjoy doing most of the activities he/she used to do? Have there been changes in how my pet interacts with other family members?

**Appetite** - This is often a big indicator. Does my pet still enjoy eating? Has his/her eating behaviours changed? Most often, once your pet consistently loses interest in food, the quality of life has diminished.

**Activity** - Does my pet seem in pain or reluctant to get up and move around? Is he/she able to go outside or to the litter box to urinate and defecate on his/her own?

Discuss your perception of these and other factors with your veterinarian to determine the cause of the decrease in quality of life. It may be helpful to keep a daily diary to keep track of patterns and changes. Some behaviours that pets display are commonly viewed as 'normal aging'. Your veterinarian can help determine if this is the case.

Bi-annual examinations for senior pets can help to prevent or manage certain diseases, as well as aid in seeking options for palliative care. There are various treatments, supplements, diets and medications available from your veterinarian that may improve your pet's quality of life. Age itself is not a disease, nor a reason for euthanasia.

### Should my family be present for euthanasia?

The comfort and welfare of your pet is the everyone's highest priority, your veterinarian can assist you in determining the timing of euthanasia. Whether or not you and your family choose to be present at the time of euthanasia is a personal decision. However, it is important for all family members to have a chance to say goodbye whenever possible. If you chose not to be present for the euthanasia, you also have the option to visit with your pet after euthanasia. Many people avoid this heartbreaking goodbye but often regret it later. Take time to make the goodbye special, every bond is strong and should be celebrated at the end of life.

### What will happen to my pet's body after euthanasia?

Rest assured that your pet's remains will be handled gently, with dignity and respect. His/her body will be safely kept at an appropriate temperature until a designated cremation service arrives or burial plans are finalized.



### What options do I have regarding aftercare for my pet?

Speak with your veterinary team regarding aftercare options that the clinic offers. There are several aftercare options available such as private cremation, where your pet's remains are returned to you in a special urn. There is also group cremation where the pet is cremated and buried with other beloved pets. Some areas have local pet cemeteries. You can check with local government regulations about pet burial laws. Discuss keepsakes with your family and veterinary staff. For example, some people wish to keep a clipping of fur or receive a clay paw print impression of their beloved pet.

### How can I explain death and support my children through the loss of their pet?

Parents dealing with their own sadness often feel overwhelmed with the uncertainty of how to explain death to their children. If possible, it is beneficial to gain information to prepare for discussions and questions surrounding euthanasia and death prior to the event occurring.

Pawsitive Resources offers books for children which includes an illustrated children's story, as well as a resource guide for parents to provide guidance through the difficult discussions surrounding death and the emotions surrounding grief. Ask your veterinarian about their recommendations and visit [www.pawsitiveresources.com](http://www.pawsitiveresources.com) for more information on these books for children and teens.



Month: \_\_\_\_\_

Pet's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**ATTITUDE**

Poor: 😞 Adequate: 😐 Good: 😊

**APPETITE**

Food (F : incr/dec arrow)  
Water (W: inc/dec arrow)  
if same or no change (NC)    ↑    ↓    NC

**ACTIVITY**

Scale of 1 – 5  
1=unacceptable    2=poor    3= fair  
4= good    5= excellent

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

NOTE: please include these on your calendar if applicable:  
1) New medication/treatment/therapy starts (Rx)  
2) Time of day when changes occur in any of the above attitude/appetite/activity  
3) Questions for your veterinarian