

How Do I Know When it's Time?

Assessing Quality of Life for Your Companion Animal and Making End-of-Life Decisions



Often, well-loved pets are euthanized to minimise unnecessary suffering. The quality of animals' lives is defined by their overall physical and mental well-being, not just one aspect of their lives.

The chart on the opposite side of this sheet attempts to consider all aspects of your pet's life. It is important to remember that all pets are different. What may be considered a poor quality of life for one may be different for another. Higher numbers on this chart equal a better quality of life.

This chart may help you to better visualise the general well-being of your pet. In some cases, even one item on the left-hand side of the chart (for example: pain) may indicate a poor quality of life, even if many of the other items are still positive. Some items or symptoms on the list may be expected side effects of the treatments that your pet is undergoing. It is important to discuss these symptoms and side effects with your veterinarian.

As pet owners ourselves, we know making the decision to say goodbye to a loved one can be incredibly difficult. Canberra Veterinary Emergency Service is here to help you through this emotional time, and we will do our best to support you and your pet through this emotional time.

Questions to ask yourself:

- What is the most important thing when considering my pet's end-of-life treatment?
- What are my thoughts about euthanasia?

Would I consider euthanasia if the following were true about my pet:

- Feeling pain?
- Can no longer urinate and/or defecate?
- Starts to experience seizures, or worsening seizures?
- Has become uncontrollably violent or is unsafe to others?
- Has stopped eating?
- Is no longer acting normally?
- Has a condition that will only worsen with time?
- Financial limitations prohibit treatment?
- Palliative (hospice) care has been exhausted or is not an option?
- The veterinary team recommends euthanasia?
- The veterinary team recommends euthanasia, but the required symptoms or situations that I listed above are not present?

"How do I know when it's time?"

The following tools may aid you in making the decision to euthanise.

- Enlist the help of your veterinarian. While your veterinarian cannot make the decision for you, it is helpful for him/her to know that you are considering euthanasia.
- Remember how your pet looked and behaved prior to the illness. Sometimes changes are gradual, and therefore hard to recognize. Look at photos or videos of your pet from before the illness.
- Mark good and bad days on a calendar. (Some may choose to distinguish morning from evening.) This could be as simple as a happy or sad face for good or bad. If the bad days start to outweigh the good, it may be time to discuss euthanasia.
- Write a concrete list of three to five things your pet likes to do. When your pet is no longer able to enjoy these things, it may be time to discuss euthanasia.

