

How Will I Know When It's Time?



Rest Your Paws

Deciding when to put your beloved pet to sleep is one of the most difficult decisions you will ever have to make. However, it is also one of the most selfless and kind decisions you can make for your companion to alleviate pain and suffering. So how do you know when your pet is really suffering? As veterinarians we commonly get asked this question, and sometimes there is no straightforward answer. There are many factors to consider, such as your pet's age, their health concerns, availability of veterinary hospice care, financial constraints and other life factors impacting the care of your pet. If you are still unsure about your pet's quality of life, even after reviewing some of the resources below, please reach out to your regular veterinarian or one of our palliative care veterinarians. We are here to help you with this important decision, and make sure that your pet has the most peaceful end-of-life experience possible.

Evaluating Quality of Life

What is 'Quality of Life' for a Pet?

You've probably heard the sayings "You'll just know when it's time" or "When she stops eating" or "When he can't get up anymore". These statements can not only be misleading but can lead to prolonged suffering as well as decisions made too early. What makes life worth living for your pet? At what point do you think life would no longer be enjoyable?

Here are 3 simple ways to evaluate your pet's QOL:



Write a list of the top five things your pet loves to do. When they are no longer able to enjoy the majority of these things, it may be time to discuss euthanasia.



Remember how your pet looked and behaved in their prime. Sometimes changes are gradual, and therefore hard to notice. Look at photos or videos of your pet from the past.



Keep track of good and bad days on our 'Quality of Life Assessment Calendar' on page 12. If the bad days start to outweigh the good, it may be time to discuss euthanasia.

It is important when assessing quality of life to base your decision on the whole picture, by taking into consideration their emotional, physical and social well-being. Evaluating all of these factors together is much more accurate than relying on one factor alone.

Physical Wellbeing

- ♥ Are they able to breathe comfortably?
- ♥ Are they eating and drinking well? Or losing weight and becoming dehydrated?
- ♥ Are they able to walk, urinate, defecate, and groom on their own?
- ♥ Are they able to have a restful sleep?
- ♥ Are they reluctant to be picked up or held?
- ♥ Are they showing any signs of pain or discomfort such as vocalising, limping, not moving very much?

Emotional Wellbeing

- ♥ Do they have a good level of mental stimulation and engagement?
- ♥ Do they still have a reasonable level of control over their environment?
- ♥ Are they able to enjoy their usual routine and daily activities?
- ♥ Are they coping well with the stress of ill-health?
- ♥ Are they experiencing any level of anxiety or distress, or sleepless nights?
- ♥ Has your pet's personality changed?
- ♥ Would you say your pet is happy?

Social Wellbeing

- ♥ Are they engaged with the family and interactive or tired, withdrawn, and hiding?
- ♥ Has your relationship with your pet changed?
- ♥ Is your pet still affectionate and playful?
- ♥ Do they still enjoy relationships with other animals?
- ♥ For outdoor cats, are they still able to go out and explore?
- ♥ For dogs, can they still go to the park or for walks to meet other people and dogs?

Another very important consideration is how you as a pet owner are coping with caring for an elderly or terminally ill pet.

Caring for a sick pet is hard work and takes its toll physically, emotionally, and financially.

How is *your* quality of life?



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Signs Your Pet is No Longer Enjoying a Good Quality of Life

As pet owners, it is unbearable to think that our companions may be suffering while in our care. It is important to remember that suffering does not necessarily mean pain. An animal's quality of life depends on their ability to fulfil their physical, mental, social, and emotional needs.

Here are some signs your pets quality of life has declined

- Trouble breathing, weakness or extreme lethargy
- Nausea, frequent vomiting or diarrhoea that cannot be resolved by treatment from a veterinarian and is resulting in weight loss and/or dehydration
- Chronic and intractable pain that doesn't go away even with medication
- Difficulty walking or getting up
- Refusing to eat or drink
- Difficulty urinating or defecating
- Significant behaviour changes and/or losing interest in surroundings, family activities or their favourite activities



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Quality of Life Assessment Calendar

Keep this calendar on the fridge and each day evaluate whether your pet is having a good day, average day or bad day.

Keeping track of overall trends can help you evaluate your pets quality of life.

Many families use this tool to involve children in monitoring how their pet is feeling, allowing them to better come to terms with their pet's illness.

😊 good day 😐 average day 😞 bad day

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday

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○	○	○	○	○	○	○
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