



Red Cedar Animal Hospital, PC

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THE QUALITY OF LIFE SCALE

There is a real need for assessing various levels of quality of life for aging, ailing and terminally ill pets. Many geriatric animals have abnormal conditions that worsen over time. We are frequently asked, "When is the right time to euthanize my beloved pet? How will I know?" A quality of life scale helps caretakers evaluate whether they are able to provide enough help to maintain an ailing pet in a humane way.

Every pet has certain needs that should be recognized and respected. If we can meet these basic needs at a satisfactory level, then we are justified in preserving the life of the ill pet during its decline.

The following list of seven quality of life properties is an aid to help you recognize the comfort level of your companion. It is our goal to assist you in meeting the basic needs for your ailing pet. Other than "Happiness," if you consistently rate your pet at a 5 or higher, please consult with us so we can help make your pet more comfortable. A score above 5 on most of these values may indicate we have a "pawspice" (vet hospice) type end-of-life program.

Hurt: 1-10

Adequate pain control is first and foremost on the scale. This includes the pet's ability to breathe properly. Pain control may include oral, transdermal or injectable medications.

Hunger: 1-10

If a pet is not receiving adequate nutrition willingly, by hand or force feeding, then consult your veterinarian about placing a feeding tube. Malnutrition develops rapidly in an ailing pet. Using blended or liquid diets may help maintain caloric intake.

Hydration: 1-10

There are many ways to encourage your pet to drink. Subcutaneous fluids are a wonderful way to supplement the fluid intake of ailing pets, and many people are willing to learn to do this at home.

Hygiene: 1-10

Can the pet be kept brushed and cleaned? Is the coat matted? Does the pet lie in its waste after elimination? Pets may not be able to keep themselves clean like they used to. They may need help cleaning around their mouth and sanitary areas. Sponge baths can help keep the pet smelling and looking clean.

Happiness: 1-10

Does the pet still interact with the family and respond to things going on around him? Do they still enjoy being petted? Is the pet able to experience joy or mental stimulation? When the pet stops "smiling", we need to assess these other values to see if we can improve attitude. If the pet remains antisocial and glum, this is a large factor that contributes to poor quality of life.

Mobility: 1-10

Can the pet move around on its own or with help to satisfy its desires? Does the pet feel like going out for a walk? Will a harness, sling or cart be helpful? If mobility is compromised and the pet spends a large time laying down, do they have a comfortable bed? Is their position changed routinely to prevent bed sores? Do cats have easy access to their litter box? Do dogs have a ramp available to go outside so that they don't have to negotiate stairs?

More Good Days Than Bad: 1-10

When there are too many bad days in a row or if the pet seems to be "turned off" to life, quality of life is compromised. Bad days are usually filled with experiences such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, frustration, seizures, etc. Bad days also could be from profound weakness from anemia, or from discomfort from a large, inoperable tumor.

It is very difficult for families to make the final decision to end a beloved pet's life with euthanasia. Often, people wish their ailing pet would die peacefully in their sleep. Unfortunately, this does not commonly occur, and we are faced with evaluating our pet's quality of life to help determine when the appropriate time is to help

them pass to the “ Rainbow Bridge ”, where the poem states all our deceased pets are rejuvenated and are romping with playmates and having fun until they wait for us to join them.

The Big Decision

Once a decision is made that is the right time to schedule euthanasia, here are some questions to address.

1. What is involved? We try to schedule an appointment at the end of the morning or afternoon so the appointment is not rushed and there aren't a lot of people around. We want a quiet, calm atmosphere.
2. Should I be present? This is entirely up to you. Some people like to remember their pet awake and do not want to be present. This is OK, and a very personal decision. If you choose to be with your pet, that is OK too.
3. Should the children be present? Again, this is a personal decision up to you. It mostly depends on the age of the child. Very young children may not understand the procedure. For others, it may be their first encounter with death of a loved one. There are books available to help children cope with grief, such as Mr. Rogers' book “When a Pet Dies”.
4. What happens afterward? There are several different options available. There may be local ordinances against pet burial in your yard, so that is something to check on if you'd like to pursue home burial. We can also arrange to have your pet cremated and have the ashes returned to you. You can then bury the ashes or keep them in a decorative urn. If you leave your pet with us after the euthanasia, we arrange for cremation.
5. How will my other animals react? This is a good question. If animals have shared a close bond, the surviving pet may mourn as profoundly as you. Some may even need medical attention to help get them through a tough time. Some people choose to bring the companion animal along so they can visit the body after passing to realize their buddy is gone.
6. Is it wrong to go out and get another pet? After the pain of losing a pet, many people feel they could never have another. You may not realize how much of a presence your pet was in your home until they're gone. Obtaining a new pet is not an act of betrayal to your old pet's memory. In fact, there is a poem written from a dog's viewpoint that talks about the act of bringing a new pet into the house being a tribute to the other pet's memory. You loved him so much that you can't stand the thought of being without an animal companion.
7. For anyone who has difficulty dealing with the loss of their pet, there is a support group at MSU that meets monthly, as well as a Pet Loss Support Hotline at MSU. The # is 517.432.2696.