

Euthanasia

The life expectancy of a domesticated animal is much longer than that of many wild animals. Breed also has a significant influence on lifespan. At some stage it may become obvious that your pet's life is drawing to a close (slowing down). It is at this point that you will be faced with a painful and difficult decision about whether your pet should be taken to the vet to be euthanased.

The definition of euthanasia is 'humane death', meaning your pet may be suffering with poor Quality of Life and can be relieved from this.

When is euthanasia necessary?

Euthanasia (often called 'putting to sleep') is the term used by vets for the process of preventing the suffering of an animal that is too old or sick to have a happy and fulfilled life. It is never an easy decision and many owners understandably delay making it for as long as possible. Physical pain is not the only form of suffering, quality of life is important too and there are a number of situations in which euthanasia is the kindest thing to do for your pet. Please don't be afraid to speak to a vet or vet nurse for advice, they will be more than happy to spend time talking through your options and any questions you have.

What will happen?

For dogs and cats, your vet may shave the fur from a patch of skin on one of your pet's front legs and insert a needle or catheter/cannula into a vein. A veterinary nurse will normally be present to assist the veterinary surgeon throughout. Your vet will then give a large dose of a drug (a form of anaesthetic). This will make your pet fall into a deeper sleep and lose consciousness. If your pet is showing any signs of stress or fear, we will sedate them so they fall asleep prior to catheter placement.

For small mammals (rabbits, guinea pigs rats etc), we anaesthetise them, usually achieved by a gaseous agent. This is so they are asleep when the injection is given, so they don't experience pain or fear.

For all pets, the breathing will become shallow and their heart rate will gradually stop. In your pet's last moments they may gasp. This is a reflex and not conscious breathing - it is called 'agonal' breathing and is perfectly normal. Other muscles in your pet's body may also twitch and, as the body relaxes, your pet may also empty their bowels or bladder.

Should I be there at the end?

Discuss in advance with your vet whether you wish to be with your pet when they are put to sleep. It may be less stressful for your pet to be held in your arms and to be able to hear a familiar voice. You may be comforted by knowing that your old friend suffered no pain and was peaceful at the end. However, if you are frightened or anxious your pet may sense this and may also become upset.

Can my pet be put to sleep at home?

Vets usually prefer to see their patients at the surgery where all the equipment and trained staff they need are close at hand. However, euthanasia is a special situation for both the vet and yourself and, if you would prefer to have your animal put to sleep in their own home, then we will accommodate.

When is the right time for euthanasia?

It is you who must decide whether, or when, euthanasia is the right thing for your pet. Your vet will be able to advise you on what the options are and make a sensible recommendation, however we will not be able to make the decision for you. It is rare that a decision has to be made on the spur of the moment, so it is much better to make your choice after talking it over with your vet and with other members of your family. It is important that all members of the family are involved in the decision-making process and that they are all in agreement. Do not exclude children; talking to them before the decision has been made may help them to come to terms with the loss.

How will I feel?

It is perfectly natural to feel grief after losing a pet and there is no shame in feeling strong emotions. Sometimes the first response to a pet's death is anger or guilt. Often people wonder whether anyone could have done more for their pet. The depth of friendship with pets may be greater than that of many human friends and a period of mourning is quite normal. However, people experience grief in different ways and there are no hard and fast rules about what you will feel. It may help to have someone to take you home after your pet has been put to sleep so that you do not have to return to an empty house. Talking to friends and family is important, especially your children, if you have any. The Blue Cross also has a bereavement helpline, so please ask the vet if you are struggling.

How will my children cope?

Losing a pet can be the first time that a child becomes aware of death. It is usually best to be honest with a child and explain the truth as clearly as you can. Children may want time to say goodbye to their pet and seeing the dead body may help them understand what has happened. It can be very therapeutic to mark the occasion with some kind of memorial such as a burial. Talking about the happy times you shared and/or looking at photos will often help them and yourself come to terms with the change in your lives. Children frequently get over the loss of a pet much more quickly than adults do.

What happens to my pet's body?

There are three options available to you. You can take your pet home to bury in your garden. Alternatively your pet can be cremated as a communal cremation with other pets whose owners have chosen this service. These ashes are scattered in the Paws to Rest garden. Alternatively an individual cremation allows your pet's ashes to be returned to you in an urn or casket of your choice, or in a hessian bag so your pet's ashes can be scattered. The crematorium which we use is a local, trusted company called Paws to Rest situated in Armathwaite. You can rest assured that your pet will be treated with dignity and respect at all times. If you would like more information about the crematorium service, return of ashes options or prices please don't hesitate to ask.



Should I get another pet

After the experience of losing a pet some people say they never want to own another pet. However, many others find that getting another pet helps them deal with their grief. There is no right or wrong decision as to when or if you get another pet, everyone will feel differently. The relationship you build with another pet will never be the same as the one you had but it can be equally rewarding.

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