

Quality of Life and the Decision to Euthanize

The decision to try additional medical treatments or consider euthanasia for a sick or chronically ill pet is a hard decision to make for many pet owners. This handout has been designed to help you consider the quality of life of your pet and help make you aware of some options that exist. Answer each question yes or no.

Pain

Many animals do not complain in obvious, visible ways when they are hurt. Many animals will hide their discomfort as much as possible. Consider the following:

My pet hurts.

Yes or No

My pet limps (if it didn't hurt, he wouldn't limp).

Yes or No

My pet pants frequently, even at rest.

Yes or No

My pet's respirations are forced, exaggerated, or otherwise not normal.

Yes or No

My pet guards or protects an area of his body and may snap if that area is approached or touched.

Yes or No

My pet's posture is abnormal or different than normal.

Yes or No

My pet shakes or trembles sometimes during rest.

Yes or No

My pet is on pain medication and it doesn't work.

Yes or No

Possible interventions for yes answers: start pain medications, change pain medications, combinations of pain medications from different drug classes, surgery, non-traditional medicine (acupuncture, etc.), treating underlying disease/condition.

Appetite

Possible interventions for yes answers: start pain medications, change pain medications, combinations of pain medications from different drug classes, surgery, non-traditional medicine (acupuncture, etc.), treating underlying disease/condition.

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Hydration

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Hygiene

Animals that don't feel well, especially cats, do not have the energy to maintain normal hair and skin. Consider the following:

My cat doesn't groom his/herself anymore.

Yes or No

My pet's hair is matted, greasy, rough looking, dull, or foul smelling.

Yes or No

My pet has stool pasted around his/her butt or in his/her hair.

Yes or No

My pet smells like urine or has skin irritation from urine.

Yes or No

My pet has pressure sores/wounds that won't heal.

Yes or No

Possible interventions for yes answers: regular brushing and grooming, frequent bedding changes, adequate padding for areas where the pet spends a lot of time, appropriate wound care, and treatment of underlying disease/condition.

Activity/Mobility

Changes in normal activity can be due to mobility problems, pain, illness, or aging (arthritis). Consider the following:

My pet cannot get up without assistance.

Yes or No

My pet has a hard time getting around and/or limps.

Yes or No

My pet lays in one place all day long.

Yes or No

My pet does not want to play ball, go for walks, or do things he/she used to do.

Yes or No

My pet falls frequently.

Yes or No

Possible interventions for yes answers: pain medication addition or adjustment, physical therapy.

Happiness/Mental Status

Another important area of consideration is the pet's mental status and happiness. Consider the following:

My pet does not express joy and interest in life.

Yes or No

My pet does not respond to the people that he/she used to respond to.

Yes or No

My pet does not want to play with toys or do things that he/she used to enjoy.

Yes or No

My pet seems dull, not alert, or depressed.

Yes or No

General Behavior Patterns

Changes in normal behavioral patterns are often a key indicator of how well an animal feels. Consider the following:

My pet is hiding or sleeping in odd places.

Yes or No

My pet doesn't greet me when I come home and he/she used to.

Yes or No

My pet is overly clingy and follows me around and he/she never used to.

Yes or No

My other pets are treating this pet differently – they are overly attentive or ignoring him completely.

Yes or No

My pet doesn't care what's going on around him/her.

Yes or No

Owner Perceptions

Many times an owner is aware that their pet is suffering but does not want to give up on their pet. Consider the following:

I wouldn't want to live if I were in a similar situation.

Yes or No

It would be painful if I were in a similar situation.

Yes or No

I have made appointments for euthanasia for this pet and canceled or didn't show up.

Yes or No

I am holding on to this pet for sentimental reasons (the pet belonged to a now-deceased family member, the pet helped me through a hard time in my life, etc).

Yes or No

My pet is having more bad days than good days

Yes or No

Count the number of Yes and No answers you have marked.

Yes Total

No Total

Unfortunately, there isn't a simple point system or scale that will tell you exactly what to do for your pet. However, the more yes answers you have, the more likely it is that your pet has a poor quality of life. 21 yes answers imply that your pet has a diminished quality of life. If this is the case, you have two

Options:

1. Make major changes to try to improve your pet's quality of life (like some of the things listed after each set)

or

2. Euthanize your pet to relieve his/her suffering