

How Do I Know When it is Time to Say Goodbye

One of the toughest decisions we have to make as pet owners is the decision of when to end our pet's suffering. Though it is one of the hardest things we have to face, it is truly a blessing that we can offer humane euthanasia (a release from pain) to our beloved companions. One of your best guides on this journey will be your veterinarian. Please talk to him or her and don't be afraid to ask questions and voice concerns.

Something that can be very helpful is to keep a journal. Record things that troubled you about your pet's day and at the end of the day write at the bottom whether you feel your pet enjoyed the majority of the day or whether, overall, they had a "bad" day. Journaling can be a much more objective way to assess whether your pet is still enjoying their life.

Here is a short list which will help you decide whether it is time or not:

1. Is my pet physically and mentally able to engage in many of the normal activities that make him or her happy as a dog or cat?
2. Are we able to keep him or her comfortable and able to move around and engage in activities in a relatively pain-free manner. Your veterinarian can help with this and advise you when nothing further can be done. There are many ways we can help your older or sick pet to enjoy comfort rather than suffer from pain.
3. Is your pet eating an amount of food sufficient for their size (measure the amounts) and are they maintaining their weight.
4. Are things like vomiting or diarrhea being kept under control? Chronic nausea (which often manifests as lack of appetite) and starvation are not considered good quality of life.
5. Is your pet engaging in activities with the family or have they become withdrawn?
6. Have you relegated your loved one to a back room, basement or garage due to incontinence or other issues? This is no life for your pet.
5. Are you financially and emotionally able to pursue keeping your pet as comfortable and healthy as possible?

What not to do: Please do not ignore your pet and allow them to continue to suffer. The decision is not an easy one, but it is our duty to do what is best for our pets when the end is near and the rest of their little lives will only involve worsening or prolonged misery. Please talk to your veterinarian. He or she is there to help you keep your pet healthy and comfortable and, if this is not possible, to provide humane euthanasia as the most loving choice for your pet.