



What to Expect If You Choose to Be With Your Pet During Euthanasia

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If you are facing your pet's euthanasia, you're probably feeling confused and emotional and your pet may be suffering, too. I've faced this decision myself many times and understand that this is a very difficult time. It's never easy to say good-bye to a dear, beloved pet.

Although choosing euthanasia for your pet can be one of the hardest decisions you face in life, I believe it can also be a gift that you selflessly give your companion animal. Euthanasia means "good death." It is a way to humanely and lovingly end a pet's suffering. I know from my professional experience that today's veterinarians go to great lengths to make the euthanasia experience comforting and reassuring for pets and for pet parents like you. Rest assured that this is true whether or not you and your family choose to be with your pet during the euthanasia procedure.

If you are considering euthanasia for your pet and wondering about being there during the procedure, it's helpful to discuss the medical steps involved with your veterinarian. Please don't make assumptions about euthanasia based on your previous experiences. It's important to have a thorough understanding of your *current* veterinarian's methods because each veterinarian uses slightly different drugs and techniques.



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It's also helpful to understand the impact that being present or not being present during your pet's euthanasia may have on your own emotions. For the past 25 years, I've worked with hundreds of pet parents who have struggled with making this difficult decision. Most of these pet parents found it a bit easier to make this decision when they were well-informed about what they were likely to see and experience before, during and after the procedure.

With the best of intentions, then, I offer the following detailed descriptions so you can make the decision that is right for you. In general, you can expect most of the following circumstances to be part of your experience. Some of this material may be hard to read as the descriptions may trigger feelings of sadness and anxiety. Again, I understand that it's never easy to think about losing your beloved pet.

- Your veterinary clinic may provide a comfortable, private space where you and your family can gather around your pet to say good-bye and be with your pet as he or she dies. This space might be a home-like room, a large soft mat on an exam room floor, or even an outdoor garden area. Pet hospice ➔

(Cont.)

and in-home euthanasia services are also becoming more common. These options allow you to say good-bye to your pet in his or her familiar surroundings. You may want to take some time now to think about where you and your pet will be most comfortable as you say good-bye.

- Although you may have an appointment time for your pet's euthanasia, the procedure doesn't have to happen immediately when you arrive. Your veterinarian understands you may want to take time to say good-bye, both before and after death has occurred. For instance, you may want to gather those in attendance to read a poem, say a prayer, or sing a song. You may also want to offer each person present—children, other family members or friends—some time alone to say a personal and private good-bye. As long as your overall time frame is reasonable, your veterinarian can most likely accommodate your wishes. You may want to set aside some time to plan how you want to say good-bye to your pet and to gather the items you'll want to bring along with you.
- While the protocols and drug combinations veterinarians use will vary, once your veterinarian begins the medical procedure, your pet's death will occur quite predictably and rapidly. For example, once the euthanasia solution is injected, your pet's heart, breath and brain activity will stop within several seconds.
- As your pet's bodily functions shut down, it's not unusual to see muscles twitch or to hear some deep, loud breaths expelled from your pet's body. Your pet may also lose some urine or feces from his or her bowel because the muscles that hold waste material inside the body no longer work. Likewise, closing the eyes requires muscle control, so your pet will most likely die peacefully with his or her eyes open. All of these are normal reactions and don't always occur. They are mentioned here so you can feel prepared, rather than confused or concerned, if you do witness them.
- After death, your pet's body will remain soft and warm for quite some time, so you might find it comforting to stroke your pet's fur as you sit next to his or her body. If you wish to hold or move your pet's body after death occurs, be prepared for it to feel limp and heavy. And, take care to support your pet's head as you lift him or her because the neck muscles will no longer engage.
- When you are ready to finally leave your pet's body, you may want to take something with you as a memento. For example, you may want your pet's collar or a clipping of your pet's fur, especially from an area you often touched, like an ear or a tail. Your pet's paw may also be symbolic of the connection or relationship you enjoyed with your pet. Your veterinarian can use modeling clay to make an impression of your pet's paw, creating a lasting keepsake for you and your family. Ask your veterinarian about this option during your discussion about euthanasia. If making a clay paw print is not part of your veterinary clinic's standard services, you can arrange to make your own paw print memento.
- Please talk to your veterinarian about any variations he or she may make to this plan *before* the day of your pet's euthanasia. And, please be kind and compassionate with yourself as you consider whether or not euthanasia, as well as being present during euthanasia, feels like the right option for you and your pet. My thoughts are with you during this difficult time.

For more information, visit the Veterinary Wisdom® Resource Center at www.veterinarywisdom.com

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