



Nine Questions to Consider When Planning Your Pet's End-of-Life Care

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When you find yourself caring for your ill or aging pet, you may be facing a more difficult situation than you had anticipated. For instance, there may be many sleepless nights as you tend to your pet's needs (or simply lie awake worrying). Or, there may be physically exhausting tasks, like carrying your big dog outdoors or cleaning up mess after mess if he or she is incontinent. And, then, there is the endless list of decisions that, sooner or later, you must consider. These include dilemmas like,

"Which treatment is best for my pet, as well as for me and my family?"

"Can I afford these treatments?"

"Should I consult with a veterinary specialist or seek out a clinical trial for my pet?"

Thinking through all of these decisions can be a dreaded and overwhelming task. However, research and clinical experience show that it may be easier and less overwhelming for you if you can make these crucial choices now, before your pet is in the midst of a medical crisis. Even though the caregiving process is taxing and hectic, now is when you are relatively calm and clear-headed. Why not take advantage of these qualities to create the best end-of-life plan for you and your pet?

Being informed, prepared and mindful as you move through the decision-making process can help take the pressure off a little, so take some time now to gather your family and discuss the following questions. You can use this handout as a worksheet, jotting down notes about your preferences, as well as the issues you wish to discuss further with your veterinarian. And, when you feel your answers are complete, please share your decisions and plans with your veterinary team.



1. What medical information do you still need in order to make decisions for your pet? What aspects of your pet's condition require further clarification from your veterinarian?



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2. What do you need to understand about the treatment options you are considering for your pet? For instance, are there side effects from the recommended medications/treatments (like chemotherapy) that could be difficult to deal with? Is the recovery time and rehab process after surgery realistic for your lifestyle and financial situation?

3. What is a realistic budget that you can afford in order to care for your pet? Also, what emotional costs, as well as time investment, are you and your family able/willing to devote to your pet's care? (Note: While it may be difficult to admit that your pet's treatment may be limited by the "costs" involved, they are a big part of the reality of your pet's situation. Please be reasonable and honest with yourself and do what is realistic based on your capabilities and values. And, try to remember that your financial situation is not a measure of the love you feel for your pet. That has no limit.)

4. How will you include and involve your children in your pet's end-of-life care, as well as in the decision-making process about death or euthanasia? What resources might help you if you need to learn more?

5. What do you think your pet wants? What signs will serve as a signal to you that your pet is no longer enjoying life? For instance, if your pet no longer enjoys daily routines, treats, activities, and meals, might it be kinder to consider euthanasia? If treatment is unlikely to help your pet regain some measure of well-being and improve his or her quality of life, is it kinder to consider hospice care or euthanasia? Asking yourself a few other key questions like "Is my pet in pain?" or "Is my pet suffering?" may help you assess your pet's quality of life. While pain can be medicated, suffering is harder to define and treat. Considering your pet's overall quality of life, as well as how your pet's condition is affecting your family's routines and quality of life, may help you make your decisions.



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6. If your veterinary clinic offers a veterinary hospice or palliative care service, or if there is one available in your community, is hospice care something you are willing to pay for and commit to for your pet?

7. What do you want to say or do for your pet before he or she dies? For instance, do you want to take a last hike, say “thank you” for the many years of friendship, or seek out the resources that will help you deal with your pet’s loss. Taking meaningful action, like making a clay print of your pet’s paw, can help you feel more prepared emotionally to face your pet’s death. Many veterinarians make ClayPaws® prints as part of their pet loss support protocol. You may want to check with your veterinarian to see if this keepsake is included in their end-of-life/euthanasia support services.

8. What do you need to know about how/where/when your veterinary team will perform euthanasia? For instance, does your veterinary team offer in-home euthanasia or is there a referral practice in your community that provides this service? Ask your veterinarian to explain both the medical and emotionally supportive aspects of the euthanasia procedure. Then, after careful consideration of your own needs, let your veterinarian know how/where/when you prefer to say good-bye to your pet so you are in agreement about your priorities and wishes.

9. What body care options are available to you via your veterinary clinic? While cremation is the most common choice offered by veterinarians, other options may be more suited to your needs. What research can you do now in order to seek out other services that are available within your community?

Making caregiving and end-of-life decisions for your pet can be the most stressful part of being a pet parent. But, it can also be the most loving. Please be gentle with yourself and remember that every decision you make for your pet comes from a place of deep love and respect.

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