



Talking to Your Veterinarian about Euthanasia

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Ruth and Tim Oliver's dog, Max, was diagnosed with kidney disease when he was nine years old. Ruth and Tim had multiple conversations with their veterinarian about Max's medical care, but they never got around to discussing euthanasia. Several months later, when it was time to say goodbye, the Olivers were frustrated and disappointed to learn that their veterinary clinic was unable to offer in-home euthanasia for Max.



The initial conversation about your pet's euthanasia is never an easy one, especially if your pet still has several months to live. In fact, your veterinarian may be reluctant to bring up the topic of euthanasia "too soon" out of fear that he or she will offend or frighten you. But, if you feel the time has come for you and your veterinarian to have "the talk," dig deep inside and find the courage to ask your veterinarian about the following topics:

- **Ask about pet hospice care.**

If your veterinary team is not able to offer a pet hospice program to keep your pet comfortable during his or her last weeks and days, ask about the protocols they *do* have in place for you to manage any pain or discomfort your pet may experience.

- **Ask how the medical procedures surrounding euthanasia are conducted.**

Every veterinarian performs euthanasia in a slightly different way. For instance, one veterinarian may use a sedative to relax your pet prior to administering the euthanasia drug and another may place a catheter in your pet's rear leg so they can easily deliver the euthanasia drug. Neither of these practices are "right" or "wrong" ways to conduct euthanasia, but they are details that can help you better understand what to expect from the experience.

- **Ask how the emotional aspects of euthanasia are handled.**

Pet parents and veterinarians often have different visions about the best ways to say good-bye. If you don't share and negotiate your vision prior to your pet's euthanasia, you may find that you've made assumptions about the process and end up feeling disappointed. Tell your veterinarian about the details that are most important to you so your desires and your veterinarian's capabilities match.

For instance, if you have several friends and family who want to be present with your pet while he or she is euthanized, ask your veterinarian how many people the room will accommodate. You may also want to know whether or not you will be able to play music during the procedure, if there will be time to read a poem or conduct a brief good-bye ceremony, or how long you will be able to stay with your pet after euthanasia is completed. If you plan to have young children present during your pet's euthanasia, discuss how you and your veterinary team can best support them, while still remaining focused on the medical and emotional demands of the experience itself. →

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- **Ask where and when your pet's euthanasia will take place and when your veterinarian can be available to you.**

Find out if your veterinary clinic has a private Comfort Room or outdoor garden area for performing euthanasia. You might also want to know whether or not your veterinarian can provide in-home euthanasia for your pet.

It's also helpful to know your veterinarian's preference for the timing of euthanasia. Again, every veterinarian is different. Some prefer to schedule euthanasia at the end of the work day so they don't feel rushed to complete

the procedure. Others are able to accommodate appointments at any time during the day. In addition, it's a good idea to be clear about when *your* veterinarian is available. For instance, some take appointments during weekends and evenings while others refer their clients to specialty practices, like in-home euthanasia practitioners or emergency clinics, during their non-office hours.

- **Ask about options for caring for your pet's body.**

Today, most veterinary clinics can make arrangements for your pet's body to be cremated. Be sure to ask questions about who performs this service for them and how much it will cost. Accurate information helps you feel comfortable making this choice for your pet. If you feel that pet cremation is not the best option for you, ask your veterinarian to educate you about other body care options, like home burial, burial at a pet cemetery, animal rendering services, etc.

- **Ask about costs.**

The charges for pet euthanasia can vary widely, but they are usually based on the time and resources needed to conduct the procedure. For this reason, some veterinary clinics offer a range of options, from euthanasia as a simple medical procedure (without family in attendance) to euthanasia as a more ceremonial service performed at your own home. Be clear about the type of euthanasia you want for your pet and about how much you will be charged for those services.

- **Ask about follow-up keepsakes, resources and support services for you and your family.**

Some veterinary practices are large enough to be able to provide their own pet loss support services. Others refer clients to local pet loss support groups or mental health professionals. Your veterinarian may also provide you with books, pamphlets, and printed handouts to help you understand the healing process known as grief.

To further support you during your time of grief, it's become customary for many veterinary clinics to make a clay print of your pet's paw immediately after your pet has been euthanized. This provides you with a treasured memento of your beloved pet to take home with you. In addition, many veterinary teams encourage you to clip a lock of your pet's fur or keep your pet's collar as "links" to the happy, loving memories you shared.

You can see from these suggestions that ideal conversations about your pet's euthanasia would include detailed descriptions of how your veterinarian approaches *all* aspects of your pet's end-of-life care. There is no doubt that these conversations are emotional and difficult. Yet, please remember that they are also beneficial for you and your pet.

Learning everything you can about euthanasia *before* your beloved pet's last days provides you with the precious time you need to prepare and plan a meaningful good-bye. Your beloved pet deserves nothing less.

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