

When it's time to say goodbye to your pet, it should be gentle, surrounded by family and in your own home.

QUALITY OF LIFE WORKSHEET

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The decision to pursue 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 rationally evaluate the quality of life of your pet. Beneath each segment are treatment or nursing options that you might elect to pursue to improve your pet's quality of life.

Answer each of the questions in each section with a score from **0-5**. A score of zero means this question does not apply to my pet, a score of **5** means the condition is as severe as it could be.

PAIN:

Pain control is essential. Many animals do not verbalize or act obviously painful. Many animals withdraw, hide, or remain immobile. Many animals hide their discomfort which is a survival mechanism passed down from their ancestors. Below are some of the pain responses you are more likely to see.

Consider the following:

- My pet hurts.
- My pet limps. (If it didn't hurt, they wouldn't limp.)
- My pet pants frequently, even at rest.
- My pet's respirations are forced, exaggerated, or otherwise not normal.
- My pet licks repeatedly at one site on his/her body or at a site of a cancer/tumor.
- My pet guards or protects an area of his/her body.
- My animal's posture/gait is abnormal or different than normal. (arched back/shuffling/balance loss/using leg abnormally)
- My pet shakes or trembles sometimes during rest.
- My pet is on pain medication and it doesn't work.
- My pet is more likely to snap or bite when I touch him in painful areas.

Possible medical or nursing interventions include: start pain medication, change pain medications, combinations of pain medications from different drug classes, surgical intervention, non-traditional medicine (acupuncture, physical therapy), always be sure the underlying disease/condition has been treated properly.

Severe pain which is unrelenting or rapidly progressive despite medical interventions should prompt a decision to euthanize

BREATHING:

Breathing is imperative to life. Having difficulty breathing can be frightening and debilitating to animals.

Consider the following:

- My pet's respiratory effort (the amount of work it takes to breathe) is not normal.
- My pet must breathe or cannot breathe with his/her mouth shut.
- My pet quickly collapses or breathes heavy with exercise.
- The sounds my pet makes in breathing are getting louder.

Possible medical or nursing interventions include: Medications, corrective surgery, oxygen support, or nebulizing therapy.

Gasping to breathe, excessively working hard to breathe, excessive fatigue from breathing should either prompt an emergency trip to a veterinary hospital for immediate medical care or euthanasia.

APPETITE:

Appetite is one of the most obvious signs of wellness. Most animals are normally vigorous eaters.

Consider the following:

- My pet doesn't eat his/her normal food anymore.
- My pet picks at his/her food now but never used to do this.
- My pet walks over to his/her food and looks at it but won't eat or walks away.
- My pet doesn't even want good stuff (treats, human foods, snacks) anymore.
- My pet acts nauseated or vomits.
- My pet is losing weight.

Possible medical or nursing interventions include: hand feeding, heating food, adding moisture by soaking food or using canned varieties, careful addition of human foods, syringe feeding, stomach tube placement, medications for appetite stimulation, medications for nausea.

HYDRATION:

Hydration status is equally important as appetite. Without adequate water consumption, your pet can become dehydrated. Dehydration can contribute to weakness and not feeling well.

Consider the following:

- My pet doesn't drink as much as he/she used to.
- My pet frequently has dry, sticky gums.
- My pet is vomiting or has diarrhea (fluid loss can also contribute to dehydration).

Possible medical or nursing interventions for include: add moisture to the diet, subcutaneous fluid administration, medications to control vomiting or diarrhea.

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 herself any more.
- My pet's hair is matted, greasy, rough looking, dull, or foul smelling.
- My pet has stool pasted around his/her rectum or in his/her hair.
- My pet smells like urine or has skin irritation from urine.
- My pet has pressure sores/wounds that won't heal.

Possible medical or nursing interventions include: regular brushing and grooming, frequent bedding changes, adequate padding for areas where the pet spends a lot of time, appropriate wound care, treat the 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.
- My pet had a hard time getting around and/or limps.
- My pet lays in one place all day long.
- My pet does not want to play ball, go for walks, or do the things he/she used to do.
- My pet falls frequently.
- Because of my pet's arthritic or spinal cord disease he is now occasionally/regularly incontinent.

Possible medical or nursing interventions include: pain medication addition or adjustment, physical therapy.

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HAPPINESS/MENTAL STATUS:

Another important area of consideration is the pet's mental status and happiness. Answer this important question. When my pet was young and healthy his/her favorite things to do were:

Is your pet still doing them? Why or why not? Give yourself 3 pts if he is still doing one of them, 4 pts if he is doing two of the things, 5 pts for all three things.

Consider the following:

- My pet does not express joy and interest in life.
- My pet does not respond to the people that he/she used to respond to.
- My pet does not want to play with toys or do other things that he/she used to enjoy.
- My pet seems dull, not alert, or depressed.

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.
- My pet doesn't greet me when I come home and he/she used to.
- My pet is overly clingy and is following me around and he/she never used to do this.
- My other pets are treating this pet differently they are overly attentive or ignoring him/her completely.
- My pet doesn't care about what is going on around him/her.

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:

- If I were in a similar situation I would not want to live?
- Would it be painful if I had this condition.
- I have made appointments for euthanasia for my pet, but I cancelled/didn't show up.
- I am holding onto this pet for some sentimental reason. (ex. the pet belonged to a now deceased family member, the pet helped me through a hard time in my life, etc.)
- My pet is having more bad days than good days.

If your pet's score is greater than 170 then your pet's quality of life is not ideal. . .

Make notes about your pet's specific medical condition. Speak to your family veterinarian about potential medical solutions for your pet's illness. Print off this sheet and repeat the survey at regular intervals to compare - perhaps weekly for animals who are close to their life's end, monthly for animals with a progressive disease problem, tri-annually for geriatric animals. This will allow you to see more subtle progressive changes in your pet's condition and make decisions based on these observations.