

Every pet, illness and situation is different. There is no single rule that can be followed for when it is time to help your best friend "cross the rainbow bridge." Getting input from your veterinarian on the specific medical conditions that your loved one may face is vital for doing what is best for your pet. You may also benefit from having a caring friend who is not as emotionally involved in the situation as you are to help you gain perspective and really "see" what is happening with your pet

Remember that pets live in the moment. One of the most wonderful things about animals is how they embrace the present.

When our pets are suffering, they don't reflect on all the great days they have had before, or ponder what the future will bring. All they know is how they feel today. By considering this perspective, we can see the world more clearly through their eyes. And their eyes are what matter

Ask yourself important questions. Sometimes, articulating or writing down your thoughts can make the right path more apparent. Some questions that help pet owners struggling with this decision include:

- Why do I think it might be time to euthanize?
- What are my fears and concerns about euthanizing?
- Whose interests, besides those of my pet, am I taking into account?
- What are the concerns of the people around me?
- Am I making this decision because it is best for my pet, or because it is best for me because I'm not ready to let go?

Measure their quality of life. Try to determine how good or bad our pet's life is at this moment. Assessing this can be difficult, but there are some ways you can try and evaluate it. Below are a few ways this may be done.

Is Life a Joy or a Drag?

Our pets may not be able to talk to us and tell us how they are doing, but if we pay close attention, there are many clues that can help us answer that question.

The Rule of "Five Good Things": Pick the top five things that your pet loves to do. Write them down. When he or she can no longer do three or more of them, quality of life has been impacted to a level where many veterinarians would recommend euthanasia.

Good Days vs. Bad: When pets have "good days and bad days," it can be difficult to see how their condition is progressing over time. Our minds have a tendency toward remembering and giving more weight to the good days versus the bad. Actually tracking the days when your pet is feeling good as well as the days when he or she is not feeling well can be helpful. A check mark for good days and an X for bad days on your calendar can help you determine when a loved one is having more bad days than good.

A more objective way to evaluate your pet's quality of life is by quantifying the level of hurt, hunger, hydration, happiness, hygiene and mobility. In other words, is your beloved pet in pain and can it be effectively controlled? Rate daily the pain level with a score of 1 to 10 (with 1 being the worst and 10 being the best). Continue this rating process for each of the following questions: Does your pet have an appetite? Is your pet hydrated? Is your pet happy and free of soiling from bodily wastes? Is your pet able to walk? If the majority of categories are 5 and above then consider continuing with supportive care.

Pet Hospice Journal: Keeping a journal of your pet's condition, behavior, appetite, etc., can be extremely valuable in evaluating quality of life over time.