

## How to Know When It's Time: Assessing Quality of Life and Making End-of-Life Decisions

Deciding to euthanize your pet may be one of the most difficult decisions you ever make. The quality of animals' lives is defined by their overall physical and mental well-being rather than just one aspect of their lives. The checklist below attempts to consider all aspects of your pet's life, but it is important to remember that all pets are different and that what may be considered a poor quality of life for one may be different for another. In general, if you find that your answers consistently fall lower down on the list, then it may be time to seriously consider euthanasia. Ultimately, this should be a decision made in consultation with family or friends and a trusted animal health care practitioner.

### **Appetite:**

My pet now...

- eats normally- i.e. eats the same type of food, and finishes in the same amount of time compared to 6 months ago
- will still eat regular food but takes longer to finish
- does not want to eat regular food but will still eat treats or people food
- acts interested in food but walks away from the bowl without eating
- cannot be enticed to eat no matter what I offer them

### **Hydration:**

My pet now...

- drinks, and urinates the same amount as they did 6 months ago
- has had a minor change (<25% volume) in the amount they drink, or frequency/ amount of urination compared to 6 months ago
- has had a noticeable change (25-50%) in the volume they drink, but their urination seems normal. Feces are a little harder/ drier than they were 6 months ago, but defecation frequency is normal
- has had a change of >50% in the volume they drink, and urinates abnormally-frequency, volume, or ease of urination has changed. Feces are harder, drier and less frequent than 6 months ago.
- has had a change of >75% in the volume they drink, and urinates abnormally- frequency, volume, or ease of urination has changed. Feces are hard, dry and infrequent.

### **Weight loss:**

My pet now...

- weighs and looks the same as 6 months ago

- o has lost some weight but does not look/ feel any different than 6 months ago
- o has lost weight, and I can feel their skeleton more prominently than I did 6 months ago
- o has lost weight, and I can see the change in how they look compared to 6 months ago
- o has lost >20% of body weight compared to 6 months ago, and I can easily see and feel their bones

**Appearance:**

My pet's coat now...

- o looks sleek and shiny
- o is a little dull, but I still notice my pet grooming
- o has changed in appearance-e.g. duller, thinner, skin is more flaky
- o has changed in appearance and I do not notice my pet grooming as regularly
- o is dull and lifeless and I have not noticed my pet grooming

**Toileting for cats:**

My pet now...

- o Uses the litter box normally
- o Uses the litter box most of the time, but will urinate/ defecate in other places <50% of the time
- o Urinates/ defecates outside the litter box >50% of the time
- o Does not use the litter box for urination and/or defecation
- o Will urinate and/or defecate where they are sleeping or resting

**Toileting for dogs:**

My pet now...

- o Urinates and defecates normally
- o Urinates/ defecates normally most of the time but I will find urine or feces in the house <50% of the time
- o Has changes in the frequency or appearance of their urination or defecation
- o Appears to have difficulty urinating or defecating, or will urinate/defecate in the house >50% of the time
- o Will urinate and/or defecate where they are sleeping or resting

**Mobility for cats:**

My pet now...

- o Moves around normally, and jumps/ climbs stairs as much as 6 months ago
- o Seems to have some difficulty moving around, and is less willing to jump than 6 months ago

- o Spends longer lying than they used to, but will still get up when I come to the door, or to eat and drink
- o No longer jumps or climbs stairs, and is reluctant to rise for food or water, or for rewards they used to enjoy-e.g. treat, owner arriving home from work
- o Can no longer get up

**Mobility for dogs:**

My pet now...

- o Moves around normally, and walks/ climbs stairs as much as 6 months ago
- o Seems to have some difficulty moving around, and is less willing to go on walks, or takes shorter walks than they did 6 months ago.
- o Spends longer lying than they used to, but will still get up when I come to the door, or to eat and drink
- o Is not interested in going on walks, no longer climbs stairs and is reluctant to rise for food or water, or for rewards they used to enjoy-e.g. treat, owner arriving home from work
- o Can no longer get up without assistance or falls regularly

**Activity level for cats:**

My pet now...

- o Plays and interacts with the family as much as 6 months ago
- o Will get up to eat and drink, and/or to greet me, but is more reluctant to play than 6 months ago
- o Shows interest when I get home, but will not get up
- o Is hard to find when I get home, and is hiding more
- o Shows no interest in me, and is not interested in any stimuli- treats etc.

**Activity level for dogs:**

My pet now...

- o Plays and interacts with the family as much as 6 months ago
- o Will get up to greet me, but is more reluctant to play than 6 months ago
- o Shows interest when I get home, but will not get up
- o Does not show any interest in their favorite toy, and will not get up to greet me
- o Shows no interest in me getting home, and is not interested in any stimuli- treats, stranger coming to the house etc.

**Comfort level:**

My pet now...

- o Does not seem uncomfortable

- o Seems uncomfortable <25% of the time, i.e. is slow to rise in morning, limps only at end of walk.
- o Has difficulty getting up, or lying down, or has a limp
- o Seems uncomfortable >50% of the time
- o Shows overt signs of pain- vocalization, change in temperament, hiding

**Sleep:**

My pets sleep habits...

- o Have not changed
- o Have changed; they sleep more during the day, but nighttime sleeping is the same as 6 months ago
- o Have changed; they sleep more and are harder to rouse than they were 6 months ago
- o Have changed; my sleep is disrupted by their nocturnal behavior some nights
- o Are significantly different than they were 6 months ago and my sleep is disrupted >50% of the time

**Quality of life:**

My pet now...

- o Has not had any change in their quality of life
- o Has had some change in their quality of life, but the good times outnumber the bad >75% of the time
- o Has had a change in their quality of life, and I am concerned about their quality of life 50% of the time
- o Has had a significant change in the quality of their life 75% of the time, and I am starting to think about euthanasia
- o Has more bad days than good days, and I am very concerned about their quality of life, I have thought about euthanasia a lot