

Euthanasia - What you should know

The decision regarding euthanasia is a very personal and often very difficult decision. Making this decision for a beloved pet will be something you always remember. The most important factor in deciding when it is time to euthanize a pet is assessing your pet's quality of life. Your pet's quality of life is something that you are most well equipped to judge since you are able to see them every day and understand best what makes them happy. However, there are some objective tools to help you assess quality of life.

Below is an objective table to help you assess your pet's quality of life:

Score	Criterion
1-10	Hurt – Adequate pain control, including breathing ability, is first and foremost on the scale. Is the pet's pain successfully managed? Is oxygen necessary?
1-10	Hunger – Is the pet eating enough? Does hand feeding help? Does the patient require a feeding tube?
1-10	Hydration – Is the patient dehydrated? For patients not drinking enough, are subcutaneous fluids possible?
1-10	Hygiene – The patient may need to be brushed and cleaned, especially after eliminations. Is the patient able to urinate and defecate on their own?
1-10	Happiness – Does the pet express joy and interest? Is the pet responsive to things around him or her? Is the pet depressed, lonely, anxious, bored or afraid?
1-10	Mobility – Can the patient get up with minimal assistance? Does the pet want to go for the normal walks?
1-10	More good days than bad – when bad days outnumber good days, quality of life might be compromised
Total Score	A total of over 35 points may be indicative of an acceptable quality of life

Once you have decided that your pet's quality of life is compromised and the time is appropriate for euthanasia, there are a few other items you need to consider.

Do you want to be present?

This, also, is a very personal decision. Many people feel strongly that their pet's final moments need to be with someone they know and love. However, others do not feel capable of watching their beloved pet's death and wish to remember them on different terms. It is personal and there is no wrong decision. We will respect whatever decision you make.

How is the procedure performed and what should I expect if I decide to be present?

Prior to the procedure being performed, the appropriate paperwork will need to be filled out and signed. You will have to decide how to handle your pet's remains. Most people elect to have their pet cremated although some choose to bring their pet home for burial. Certain areas have restrictions on burial so please investigate prior to choosing this option. There are two cremation options available through the hospital. Communal cremation is the less expensive option where your pet will be

cremated with other animals. With private cremation, your pet will be cremated alone and the ashes will be returned to you in a decorative wood box. Private cremation is more expensive than communal cremation. Once you have selected a cremation option and signed the appropriate paperwork, our technicians will assist you with the payment process. We typically like to have this handled prior to the euthanasia process as it can be an emotionally stressful time after euthanasia for many pet owners.

Depending on your pet's situation and the doctor performing the euthanasia, your animal may have an intravenous (IV) catheter placed prior to euthanasia. Additionally, a sedative prior to the euthanasia may be given. The euthanasia solution is a pink solution that is given IV. Once the injection is given, death comes very quickly and painlessly to the pet, often before the injection is finished. The process is not a painful or frightening process for the animal. Your pet's eyes will likely remain open during this process and there may be some twitching, gasps, or urination. If this occurs, it is typically after death and is not indicative of pain or fear in your pet.

After the process is finished, you are welcome to stay with your pet for a time to say your final good-byes. If you would like a lock of hair to take with you, ask the doctor or technician to help you.

Requirements of Red Lion Veterinary Hospital prior to Euthanasia:

- 1.) Your pet must have been examined recently or an exam must be performed prior to your pet being euthanized. Do not assume your pet's condition cannot be treated or is terminal. We may be able to help you and your pet share more quality time together.
- 2.) We do not perform convenience euthanasia. Your pet must be ill, visibly so on physical exam or based on previous diagnostics.
- 3.) In general, we do not euthanize animals we have not seen before. If you would like to bring your animal to us, expect the veterinarian to examine your animal, make suggestions for diagnostics and treatment, and possibly ask you to wait several days before euthanizing your animal.

Behavioral Euthanasia

Euthanasia of an animal due to behavioral problems is a delicate and difficult situation. This is often one of the most difficult procedures for pet owners, veterinarians and technicians. Please respect the veterinarian's decision in these matters as it can be a very emotional and stressful decision for a veterinarian to make. We have set up a few guidelines that must be followed in these situations to make the process and decision simpler for all involved.

- 1.) A physical exam and consultation with a veterinarian is required prior to euthanasia.
- 2.) Many behavioral problems have medical origins. Your veterinarian may recommend a medical work-up with diagnostics beyond a physical exam prior to euthanasia.

- 3.) Many shelters and rescues are capable of working with animals with behavioral problems. Before euthanizing your pet, consult the local rescues and shelters to see if they can help find a solution or new home for your pet.
- 4.) There are veterinary behaviorists that specialize specifically in helping you address your pet's behavioral problem. After consultation with your veterinarian at Red Lion, you may be referred to a behaviorist. Please consider this option seriously as you may be able to find a way for you and your pet to share a home together without problem.
- 5.) Your veterinarian may require you to wait a period of time after your initial examination and consultation prior to euthanizing your pet. This is meant to insure that this is an appropriate decision and all other options have been considered. Euthanasia is always a last resort for behavioral problems and all other options must be considered first.

Resources:

- 1.) SPCA - (302) 998-2281
- 2.) Delaware Humane Society - (302) 571-0111
- 3.) Faithful friends - 302-427-8514
- 4.) Consider searching for rescue organizations for your specific pet's breed. There are many locally who are able to help.
- 5.) University of Pennsylvania Veterinary School - <http://www.vet.upenn.edu/>. There are numerous resources available through the veterinary school including behavioral resources as well as grief counseling.