

End of life decisions.

Saying goodbye to a pet can be the hardest part of pet ownership. Often their health declines gradually rather than them suddenly becoming seriously unwell. Sadly, it is uncommon for your pet to peacefully pass away in their sleep and you may find yourself in the difficult position of having to decide whether their quality of life is still good, or whether it is kinder to choose to have them euthanased (sometimes called “put to sleep”).

How will I know what is right for my pet?

It can be difficult to know when is the right time to consider euthanasia for your pet. It can be helpful to think about questions such as:



Do they still enjoy going for walks or interacting with family members?

Do they seem settled when they are resting or are they restless, panting?

Is their appetite still good or are they losing interest in food?

Do they have any other signs or ill-health like vomiting or change in bladder/bowel function?

It can be helpful to talk about this with friends or family; you will know your pet better than anyone and be in the best position to know how their quality of life is at home.

If you are concerned about signs your pet is showing or think it may be time to euthanase your pet it is best to arrange an appointment with one of our vets. There may be further investigations or treatments available to improve your pet's quality of life. However if this is not the case then we can help guide you through your decisions surrounding euthanasia.

What should I do if I think my pet needs to be euthanased?

Please phone one of our surgeries to arrange an appointment with a vet. If you are sure the appointment is for euthanasia or this is a subject you wish to discuss, it is helpful to let the receptionist know this when you book the appointment. It allows us to try and find a quieter time for your appointment and make sure the appointment won't feel rushed.

Any formalities such as signing consent forms, discussing cremation options and payment can be discussed prior to the appointment. This can mean there is less you need to discuss at the surgery and you can focus this time on your pet. This of course is not essential; some people just find this option helpful to them.

Usually pets come to the surgery for euthanasia, but we do try to offer home visits for euthanasia if you feel this would be the right option for you and your pet. It is unfortunately not always possible for us to be able to offer this service, particularly at weekends or out of hours when we have reduced staffing levels.

How is euthanasia carried out?

As each pet will have their own individual needs, not every euthanasia will be the same. A fatal dose of anaesthetic is usually given by injection into a vein in one of the front legs. In some cases your vet may opt to insert a catheter before the injection is given. If your pet is fearful or aggressive, they may be given a sedative before the injection to ensure that their final moments are stress free. Your pet will be asleep in a very short time, usually less than a minute. Their breathing and heartbeat will stop soon afterwards. As your pet loses consciousness they may take a deep breath, gasp or show involuntary twitching or spasm of muscles after death has occurred. As the body relaxes, your pet's bowels or bladder may empty and their eyes may not close. This is quite normal and should not be mistaken for 'signs of life'. Your vet will check for a heartbeat, pulse and reflexes and confirm to you when your pet has passed. We will at this point ask if you would like some time with your pet to say your goodbyes, just let us know when you are ready to leave them. If you want to keep any keepsakes such as a hair clipping or keep their collar, again please just let us know so we can arrange this.

To stay, or not to stay with your pet?

The decision to stay with your pet is an individual choice, there is no right or wrong. We understand how difficult it is for you which ever decision you choose. If you decide that you do not want to stay, please be assured that your pet will be comforted throughout by our vets and nurses.

Are there any differences for smaller pets?

Pets smaller than cats and dogs usually have veins that are too small for us to be able to give the injection in the way described above. In this situation, in order for us to make sure your pet experiences no pain during euthanasia, we administer anaesthetic gases to your pet, so they first gradually fall asleep. Once they are under a deep anaesthetic we can then give them a fatal overdose of anaesthetic. Because anaesthetic gases are potentially hazardous to humans we unfortunately are not able to do this procedure with you present due to health and safety regulations.

Please be assured we will do everything we can to make this stress-free for your pet. If you wish to view the body afterwards or take them home for burial this is still possible, just let us know your wishes. We can also arrange cremation in the same way as for dogs and cats.

Remember all our staff understand how difficult losing a much-loved member of the family is, so please do not be embarrassed if you show you are upset. If at any point you have more questions, please let us know.

What happens to my pet after euthanasia?

If you wish to take your pet home for burial, you are able to do this. If you need assistance to get your pet to your car we can provide this. If you would prefer for us to make cremation arrangements we can do this with the help of Pet Cremation Services, we arrange for them to collect your pet from the surgery. If you wish to read further details about their services, their website is www.pcsonline.org.uk. They have information on both their routine cremation service, and the options available if you wish to have your pet's ashes returned. If you request return of ashes, we will contact you once the ashes are returned; this usually takes around a week.

Is there support available after the loss of my pet?

If you feel you need more support or are struggling with the loss of your pet, the Blue Cross Pet Bereavement Support Service have a support line (0800 096 6606) available from 8.30am-8.30pm or can be contacted via email (pbssmail@bluecross.org.uk). More details of this charities work are available on their website www.bluecross.org.uk.

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