

Euthanasia is one of the most difficult decisions to make for your beloved pet. Although euthanasia is a personal decision, it doesn't need to be a solitary one. Your veterinarian, family and close friends can help you make the right decision and can support you as you grieve the loss of your pet.

How will I know when it's time?

Many owners are faced with making life-or-death decisions for their pets. If you find yourself in this place, consider not only what's best for your pet, but also what's best for you and your family. For example, if your pet's quality of life is seriously impaired by an injury or disease that cannot be treated or requires more care than you and your family can provide, then euthanasia may be the right decision. Quality of life is important for pets and people alike.

If your pet can no longer experience the things they once enjoyed, cannot respond to you in their usual ways, or appears to be experiencing more pain than pleasure, you may need to consider euthanasia. Likewise, if your pet is terminally ill or critically injured, or if the financial or emotional cost of treatment is beyond your means, euthanasia may be a valid option. Sometimes asking yourself the question, "Does my pet have more bad days than good days?" can help you make the decision.

Your veterinarian understands the bond you share with your pet and can evaluate your pet's condition, estimate the chances for recovery, and discuss any potential disabilities, special needs, and long-term problems. Your veterinarian can explain medical and surgical options as well as risks and possible outcomes. Because your veterinarian cannot make the euthanasia decision for you, it is important that you fully understand your pet's condition. If there is any part of the diagnosis or the possible effects on your pet's future that you don't understand, ask questions that will help you understand.

Additional quality of life resources can be found at:
<https://www.lapoflove.com/quality-of-life-assessment>

What should I expect at the euthanasia visit?

When it is time to say goodbye, we encourage you to schedule an appointment at a time that works best for your family and when the hospital team can devote themselves fully. However, we understand that these decisions may need to be made suddenly at times, so we will do our best to accommodate your needs even without advance notice.

When you arrive for this visit, please call our front desk at 269-372-7900. We will have an exam room set up for you and guide you in. Our veterinarians and support team will discuss your preferences for the visit and after care, complete the necessary paperwork, and go over what to expect during each step of the process. You may wish to bring your pet's favorite bedding, toy, or snack. You may take these home with you at the end of the visit or choose to keep them with your pet during their aftercare.

You will want to consider if you would like to stay with your animal throughout the process, or if you would prefer to say goodbye before. When you are ready, an intravenous (IV) catheter will be placed either in the exam room or in our treatment area depending on your animal's health conditions, temperament, and your preference. While most animals find the IV catheter to be fairly painless, if your pet becomes stressed sedation may be given prior to the catheter placement. *No medications will be given before discussing this with you.*

After catheter placement, your veterinarian will confirm you have said your goodbyes and then give a sedative, followed by an injection of a medication that causes your animal to pass away. The medications are painless, and your pet will pass very quickly. Your veterinarian will confirm death as soon as your pet has passed. You may stay to grieve after this or you may leave the hospital, but we will remain with your pet so they won't be alone.

You will want to consider if you would like to take your animal home for burial or if you would prefer cremation. If you choose cremation, we will coordinate this with LifeTails. They will pick your pet up directly from our hospital and perform the cremation. If you elect to have your pet's ashes returned in an urn, they will be returned to our hospital, and you will be contacted so you know when to come back to the hospital to take them home. This typically takes less than a week. If you do not elect to have ashes returned, your animal's ashes will be scattered at their cemetery. LifeTails provides professional, compassionate services that are provided with respect.

Some families also choose to have our team make a clay pawprint as a memorial. We will let you know when the print is ready for pickup or send it home with you that day.

How do I tell my family?

While you may not have openly discussed the issue of euthanasia with your family, they may already be aware of your pet's problems. Review with them the information you have received from your veterinarian. Long-term medical care can be a burden that you and your family may be unable to bear emotionally or financially, and this should be discussed openly and honestly. Encourage family members to express their thoughts and feelings. Even if you have reached a decision, it is important that family members, especially children, have their thoughts and feelings considered.

Children have special relationships with their pets and should not be excluded from the decision-making process simply because they might seem too young to understand. Preventing children from participating in the discussion may only complicate and prolong their grief process. Children respect straightforward, truthful, and simple answers. If they are prepared adequately, children usually are able to accept a pet's death. There is no right or wrong answer about whether you bring your children to the visit as this decision is different based on age and individual preference.

Does Friendship Animal Hospital offer home euthanasia?

Home euthanasia is offered on an individual basis depending on your address, hospital staffing, and veterinarian availability. Please call us if you would like to discuss this option.

How can I say goodbye?

The act of saying goodbye is an important step in managing the natural and healthy feelings of grief and sorrow following the loss of a beloved friend and companion. Once the euthanasia decision has been made, you and other family members may want to say goodbye to your pet. Different people have different needs. A last evening with your pet at home or a visit to the pet at the hospital may be appropriate. Family members who want to be alone with their pet can be encouraged to do so. Some pet owners choose to be present during their pet's euthanasia, but others choose to say goodbye beforehand and avoid the procedure. This is a very personal decision, and you are encouraged to do what feels right for you. Do not let others pressure you into making a choice that makes you uncomfortable.

How can I face the loss?

After your pet has died, it's natural and normal to feel grief and sorrow. For some people, spending some time with their pet after euthanasia is helpful. The grieving process includes accepting the reality of your loss, accepting that the loss and accompanying feelings are painful, and adjusting to your new life that no longer includes your pet. By understanding the grieving process, you will be better prepared to manage your grief and to help others in the family who share this loss.

Be honest with yourself and others about how you feel. Everyone experiences grief differently.

Grief for a pet may not be fully respected or appreciated by some members of your community. Even well-meaning family and friends may not realize how important your pet was to you or the intensity of your grief. Comments they make may seem uncaring, even if the intentions were good. Be honest with yourself and others about how you feel. If you feel despair, talk to someone who is receptive and nonjudgmental when listening to your feelings about the loss of your pet. Seeking out social support can help you work through your grief. If immediate family and friends are unable to support you, seek out an emotionally safe and accepting environment such as a pet loss support group. Talk about your sorrow, but also about the good times you and your pet spent together, the activities you enjoyed, and the memories that are meaningful to you.

What can I expect about the grieving process?

The loss of a pet can be very stressful for the family, including other pets. Everyone experiences grief differently, and you may go through periods of feeling different emotions such as denial, sadness, anger, anxiety, numbness, and guilt. The grief can be delayed and may be brought on more intensely by the related loss of a human family member. The grief may seem overwhelming at times.

Some of these feelings may relate to how your pet died. For example, you may feel guilty or blame others for not recognizing the illness earlier, for not doing something sooner, for not being able to afford other types of or further treatment, for making the decision for euthanasia too soon or too late, or for being careless and allowing your pet to be injured. It is common for owners to feel doubt over whether they have made the best decision for their pet regardless of whether their pet was euthanized or died from disease or injury. Depression is also a common experience after the death of a special pet. If you are suffering from profound or prolonged depression, seek professional assistance.

You may consider utilizing a grief support group or other resources through the following groups:

<https://cvm.msu.edu/hospital/services/social-work/pet-loss-support-group>

<https://www.aplb.org/>

What can I do to remember my pet?

Just as the grieving process varies from person to person, so does the method of remembering the pet that shared your life.

Taking steps to memorialize your pet can be therapeutic. For example, you may opt to scatter your pet's ashes or place them in a garden or a decorative urn. You may wish to hold a funeral, to make a memorial contribution to a charity, or take other steps to honor your pet and share your memories with others who knew your pet. You may choose to display reminders of your beloved pet, such as photos or mementos or anything that helps you recall and treasure the good times you spent with your beloved pet.

Should I get another pet?

The death of a beloved pet can upset you emotionally, especially when euthanasia is involved. Some people may feel they would never want another pet. For some, the thought of having—and eventually losing—another pet may seem unbearable. These feelings may pass with time, or they may endure. For others, a new pet may help them recover from their loss more quickly. Just as grief is a personal experience, the decision of when, if ever, to bring a new pet into your life is a personal one.

Some authorities suggest getting a second pet when the older one reaches the age where their end of life can be expected within a few years. This can be a helpful way to ease into a new, but different, pet. However, such a choice is also personal, and any new pets should be introduced into the family in a deliberate manner that is considerate of family members and existing pets.

If a family member is having difficulty accepting the pet's death, getting a new pet before that person's grief has resolved may make the person feel that you think the life of the deceased pet was unworthy of the grief that is still being felt. Ideally, family members would agree on the

appropriate time to bring a new pet into their lives. Although you can never replace the pet you lost, you can find another to share your life.