

Crossroads Animal Hospital

Quality of Life: How to know when it's time to say goodbye.

What is a fair quality of life?

This is an ethical decision for which everyone will have a unique perspective. It may be helpful to consider that,

- 1) Your pet does not have a sense of time. It is not fair to ask them to suffer through pain in case it gets better later, their whole existence is centered around their current sense of wellbeing.
- 2) Sometimes people think they don't want to say goodbye until they're sure their pet is suffering. Seen from a different angle, you are asking your pet to suffer so that you feel comfortable making this decision. It may be most kind to say goodbye when the prognosis is poor, but your pet is mostly at peace.
- 3) Helping your pet pass in peace is the final act of kindness we can bestow on our furry friends.

How do we assess Quality of Life?

One quality of life scale, developed by a veterinarian, is known as the HHHHMM scale. The letters stand for Hurt, Hunger, Hydration, Hygiene, Happiness, Mobility, and "More good days than bad days." Each factor contributes to the overall quality of a life and can provide a starting point for thought, discussion, and decision making.

In general, a total of 35 or greater is considered an acceptable quality of life. However, if any factor is a zero, that can be significant enough to determine an unfair quality of life.

Rank Each Factor on a Scale of 0-10 (0 = Unacceptable, 10 = No Concerns)	Your Pet's Score
HURT - Adequate pain control & breathing ability is of top concern. Trouble breathing outweighs all concerns. Is the pet's pain well managed? Can the pet breathe properly? Is oxygen supplementation necessary?	
HUNGER - Is the pet eating enough? Does hand feeding help? Does the pet need a feeding tube?	
HYDRATION - Is the pet dehydrated? For patients not drinking enough water, use subcutaneous fluids daily or twice daily to supplement fluid intake.	
HYGIENE - The pet should be brushed and cleaned, particularly after eliminations. Avoid pressure sores with soft bedding and keep all wounds clean.	
HAPPINESS - Does the pet express joy and interest? Is the pet responsive to family, toys, etc.? Is the pet depressed, lonely, anxious, bored or afraid? Can the pet's bed be moved to be close to family activities?	
MOBILITY - Can the pet get up without assistance? Does the pet need human or mechanical help (e.g., a cart)? Does the pet feel like going for a walk? Is the pet having seizures or stumbling? (Some caregivers feel euthanasia is preferable to amputation, but an animal with limited mobility yet still alert, happy and responsive can have a good quality of life as long as caregivers are committed to helping their pet.)	
MORE GOOD DAYS THAN BAD - When bad days outnumber good days, quality of life might be too compromised. When a healthy human-animal bond is no longer possible, the caregiver must be made aware that the end is near. The decision for euthanasia needs to be made if the pet is suffering. If death comes peacefully and painlessly at home, that is okay.	