

End of life care for pets



As cherished members of our family, pets bring immeasurable joy, love and warmth into our lives, and their companionship is a source of great comfort. That's why even thinking about the end of their life can be a deeply upsetting and emotional time.



While it's never easy, taking time to plan ahead can help ensure that your pet's final moments are handled with the same care and compassion they've always given you. Preparing in advance allows you and your family to make thoughtful decisions, rather than facing a crisis during an already difficult time.

Building a trusting relationship with your vet and their team can also be incredibly helpful. They can guide and support you through each step of the decision-making process and provide emotional reassurance when you need it most.

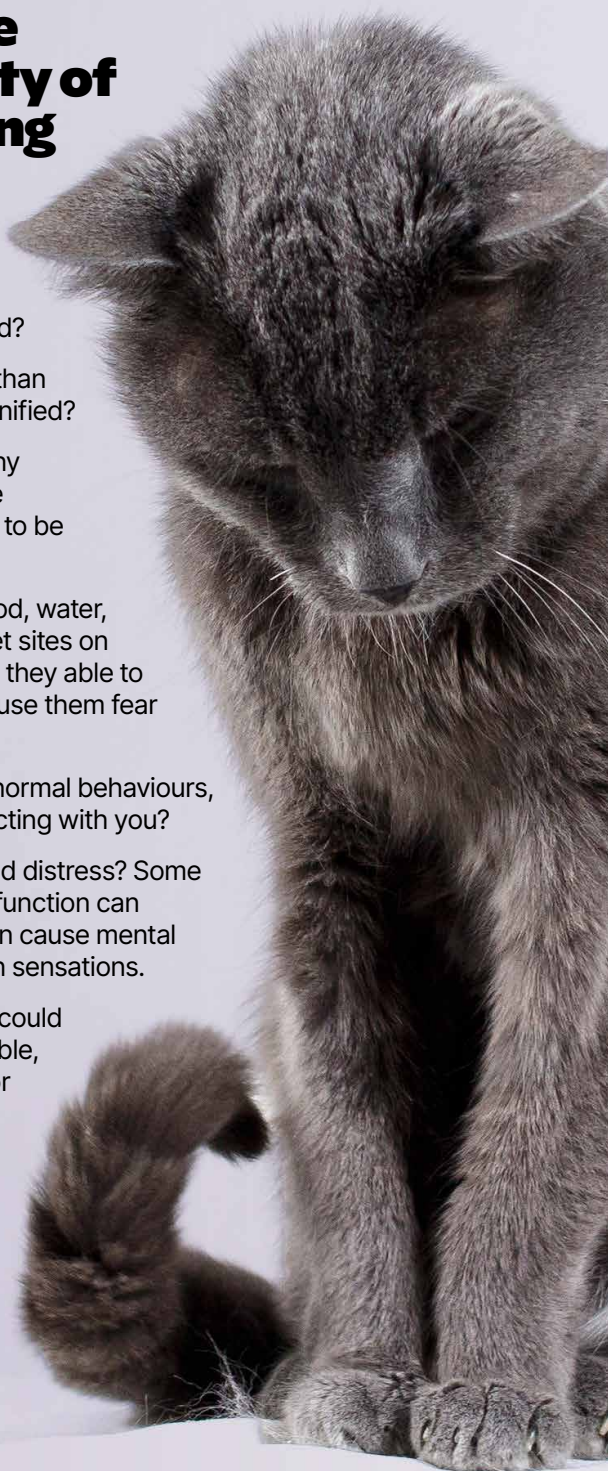
Some questions to help you and your family prepare for your pet's final chapter

- › Have you had chance to think about what might happen when the time comes? It can be helpful to talk with your vet about the euthanasia procedure and the options available at your practice. Have you been able to consider what you'd like to do with your pet's body, in a way that feels right for you and your pet?
- › Have you spoken with your family or close friends about this decision? Having someone to support you can make a big difference during such an emotional time.
- › How is everyone in your household feeling about this? Do different family members have different needs or perspectives? It's also worth thinking about how other pets or children in the home might be affected, and what support they might need.

Veterinary professionals are often asked to help guide families through the incredibly difficult decision of euthanasia. While a pet's specific clinical condition is important, it's often their overall **quality of life – their comfort, happiness, and ability to enjoy everyday moments** – that becomes the most meaningful consideration. Your vet and their team will talk you through the process with care, explain what to expect, and support you in making a decision that feels right for you and your pet. Their goal is to help ensure that, when the time comes, your beloved companion can pass peacefully – with dignity, respect, and surrounded by love.

How to evaluate your pet's quality of life and wellbeing

- › How much is your pet enjoying life? What does their day look like? Are they still able to do the things they once loved?
- › Do they have more good days than bad? Does their life still feel dignified?
- › How are they managing with any medications or treatments? Are these helping, or do they seem to be causing discomfort?
- › Can they easily access their food, water, favourite resting spots and toilet sites on their own when they want? Are they able to move away from things that cause them fear or that they don't like?
- › Are they able to express most normal behaviours, like playing, grooming or interacting with you?
- › Do they seem free from fear and distress? Some illnesses such as cognitive dysfunction can increase these; chronic pain can cause mental distress as well as physical pain sensations.
- › Is there a chance this situation could improve? Are treatments available, and are they the right choice for your pet and your family?
- › What feels like the kindest and most loving decision for your pet?
- › What feels right for you and your family, emotionally and practically?



Preparing for the loss of your pet

It's important to remember that a pet's quality of life can decline long before they stop eating and drinking.

Recognising this can be incredibly hard, but choosing a peaceful, pain-free passing is one of the most loving and respectful final gifts we can offer our companions. It's also a deeply responsible and compassionate part of being a devoted pet owner.

Spending meaningful time with your pet in their final days can bring comfort to both you and your family. These moments can help everyone begin to process the loss and hold onto the love and memories you've shared. Here are a few thoughtful ways to make the most of your time together:

- › Enjoy your pet's favourite activities – whether it's a gentle walk, a cuddle, or a special treat
- › Create a scrapbook or memory box filled with keepsakes
- › Take plenty of photos and videos to capture their personality and presence
- › Express your feelings through a drawing, letter, or poem



Coping with the loss of your pet

Losing a pet can be one of the most heart-wrenching experiences we face. Grief is a natural response to this loss, and it can take many forms. It's not uncommon to feel guilt, sadness, or even a sense of emptiness. For some, the loss may stir up emotions connected to past grief, and it's okay if you find yourself feeling withdrawn or low in mood.

There's no 'right' way to grieve – but there are gentle steps you can take to help yourself and your family begin to heal, and to remember your pet with love and peace:

- ▶ Give yourself and your loved ones time and space to grieve. Let those emotions be felt and expressed.
- ▶ Talk to friends or family members who are kind, understanding, and supportive.
- ▶ Spend time with any other pets you may have – they can offer comfort and connection.
- ▶ Make time to take care for your own wellbeing, even in small ways.
- ▶ Reach out to pet bereavement support organisations such as the Blue Cross or Cruse Bereavement Support.
- ▶ If you're finding it hard to cope, don't hesitate to seek help from a mental health professional.
- ▶ Consider creating a special way to honour your pet's memory – through a memorial, a photo album, a letter, or any tribute that feels meaningful to you.



Remember your pet by making a donation or leaving a legacy in support of future pet health

For 50 years, BSAVA PetSavers has funded vital veterinary clinical research to improve the health and welfare of pet animals. We have awarded over £1 million in research grants in the past 5 years alone, and have made a real difference to the way pet diseases are diagnosed, managed and treated. Funded studies are undertaken to the highest ethical, scientific and veterinary standards, using no experimental animals.

We receive no government funding, so your gift can help us improve the diagnosis and treatment of more pet diseases, allowing pets to have longer, fuller and healthier lives.

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