



Feline Medical Center

Your Cat. Our Priority.



Making the Decision to Euthanize

As a pet owner, one of the hardest decisions you will ever make in your life is to euthanize your pet. Euthanasia is the humane ending of your pet's life. When used appropriately, it is the last gift we can give to our beloved pets. When done in a caring and loving manner in a calm atmosphere it is a very appropriate decision for a pet that is suffering or just existing.

Making the actual decision is very difficult for most owners unless the animal is absolutely miserable. Then the decision, though difficult, is not questioned. Often the decision is made after a long-term illness where the animal has been deteriorating for an extended period of time (weeks to months) and it is a matter of when is the appropriate time. This I have found is the most difficult for people. So I wanted to share with you my thoughts on a very personal and emotional subject. Not everyone will agree with me and that is okay. Feelings regarding euthanasia are very personal and very strong. However, because it is something I deal with on a daily basis I would like to share my experiences.

The first point I would like to make to owners is we need to decide what is in your pet's best interest. Not what is in the owner's best interest or the veterinarian's best interest, but the pet's best interest. If you are honest with yourself about the quality of your pet's life it makes the decision easier. However, if you are in denial you will ignore or belittle the signs your pet is giving you. Remember that they can't tell you they are in pain or miserable and rarely do pets cry or moan, so it is important to pay attention to behavioral changes. Think about what your pet loves to do. They live to eat, play, sleep in the sun or their favorite bed, and receive attention. Therefore, it is important to evaluate these behaviors when determining the quality of your pet's life. If your dog can no longer do the things he/she used to love to do, such as go on walks, play ball, go in the backyard, or even be petted, then it may be time. If your pet basically just exists then it may be time. If your cat is hiding under the bed or in the closet and this



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is not normal for your cat then it may be time. If your pet's appetite is less than 50% of normal and he/she has lost a lot of weight, then it may be time. If your pet is in pain that cannot be relieved to a reasonable level then it may be time. If your pet has a terminal disease and is minimally active, then it may be time. Remember that pets, especially cats, are very good at hiding their pain, so it is important to evaluate the quality of their life now, compared to their normal behavior when they were well.

The biggest mistake I see owners make is waiting too long. It is such a difficult decision to make and they are so worried about cutting their pet's life too short that they wait too long and the pet ends up suffering. They wait until it is obvious euthanasia is appropriate and end up regretting later that they waited too long. I feel it is better for the pet's last days to be good days than having the pet suffer unnecessarily. Waiting until your animal has completely stopped eating, is not moving, or cannot stand up is in my opinion waiting too long. If you let your pet suffer because you could not or would not make a decision about letting go, then you have put your best interest before your pet's best interest. I know this may sound blunt, but it is how I feel. Our pets rely on us to make the best decisions we can make for them. This is the last decision we need to make for them and we need to let them go when they are suffering. We need to let them go with dignity. We need to put their welfare before our feelings of loss. Many people hope their pet will die in its sleep. Unfortunately this rarely happens without much suffering beforehand. If you are still having a hard time making the decision, consider talking to your veterinarian, a pet loss support hotline or a good friend that knows your pet and understands what you are going through. Do not be afraid to ask for support during this very difficult time.

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