

Quality of Life

When we don't want their last day to be their worst...



Quality of life is not a single day or single event, it is often a tumultuous series of ups and downs, ever-changing and unique to each patient and personality.

Some people say “you will know when your pet gives you that look.” Some of us may never get that look or our pets devoted and stoic nature shield us from recognizing their daily struggle.

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Sometimes a series of questions will help us gain perspective.

WEEKS– Are we having more good days than bad days? Are relatives or friends, who don’t see your pet everyday, commenting on their change, or decline in health?

When we have bad days, is it taking us longer to rebound? Are we rebounding to where we were before we got sick?

DAYS – is a good day today the same as what we consider a good day last week, or last month?

It is normal for our expectations to change as we do everything we can to accommodate and support our pets as their disease progresses and the require more assistance, however symptoms that were once a “shock” OR of great concern slowly become the new normal... the first time your pet didn’t finish his food, couldn’t take the stairs, stumbled or spent the night panting may have initially caused great concern to your family, but now has become the every day.

MOMENTS - are we having good days or is it "good moments" in an otherwise difficult day?

When we are getting to just the good moments, my concern grows very deep. We risk losing those moments of “good” and our ability to provide comfort and we start to stumble over that fine line between struggling and suffering.





One of the most common complaints we hear is that people fear they may have waited too long — or not long enough — before having their beloved companion animals euthanized. If it is feasible, we suggest filling this scale out three times, on three successive days, to get a more accurate appraisal. We can be too emotionally involved and subjective to easily make a clear decision. The following Quality of Life Assessment System is a means designed to help you make a more objective evaluation.

Score patients using a scale
of: 0 to 10 (10 being ideal).

Score	Criterion
0-10	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?
0-10	HUNGER - Is the pet eating enough? Does hand feeding help? Does the pet need a feeding tube?
0-10	HYDRATION - Is the pet dehydrated? For patients not drinking enough water, use subcutaneous fluids daily or twice daily to supplement fluid intake.
0-10	HYGIENE - The pet should be brushed and cleaned, particularly after eliminations. Avoid pressure sores with soft bedding and keep all wounds clean.
0-10	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?
0-10	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.)
0-10	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.
TOTAL	A total over 35 points represents acceptable life quality to continue with pet hospice.