

Preparing For Your Pet's Euthanasia



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Pet Loss And Grief, A Reference For Those Who Have Lost A Pet is brought to you by Chance's Spot - Pet Loss and Support Resources, a nonprofit organization that provides support, grief resources, and information in an effort to help those who have lost a pet.

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Thinking About Pet Euthanasia

The farthest thought from our mind when we bring a new pet into our life is its death. When we first get our pet our focus is on loving, training and watching our pet grow old. Even if it's an adult pet, we don't usually think about its death so much as we do about its life with us. We plan our days around our pets and grow extremely attached as time passes. And as it does, we eventually do begin to think about our life without them. As they age or grow unhealthy, we begin to realize that we will have to face the inevitable.

For first time pet caregivers or others who have never experienced the euthanasia procedure, this guide will provide you with answers to the questions you may have. It will also provide you with recommendations and suggestions to help you prepare.

How will I know when it's time?

Knowing when euthanasia should be considered usually depends on your pet's health. Therefore, it's important to realistically examine the quality of life your pet is experiencing. Asking yourself questions such as "Does my pet still enjoy eating and other simple pleasures?" or "Is my pet experiencing more pain than pleasure?" will assist you in making this most difficult decision.

Having your veterinarian examine your pet will also help you decide. You will surely be more comfortable in your decision if you get as much information as possible regarding your pet's condition. If your pet is sick, ask about treatment options, possible outcomes and chances of recovery. In most instances you will not need to make the decision immediately, so take time to think about what you should do.

You will also need to consider both the financial and emotional cost of continuing to care for your pet. Many people are unable to afford expensive treatment or are unable to see their pet in such pain. This doesn't make them a 'bad' pet caregiver or one who has no love and compassion for their pet. So make every effort not to blame yourself - no matter what the reason is for your decision.

Finally, discuss the decision with all family members, including children. If you have other pets, you should take their reactions into consideration as well. Often times surviving pets will grieve the loss of a companion just as we do, so it's important to be aware of what to look for and how to respond. Consult with your veterinarian or see our guide, "Your Surviving Pet and Grief", available at www.chancepot.org.

Preparing For Your Pet's Euthanasia

Once Decided

When you and your family are in agreement to euthanize your pet, talk with your veterinarian about how he or she performs the procedure. Generally, its a peaceful and virtually pain-free process, but it is best to understand what will occur and how your pet's body may react. Don't be afraid to ask your veterinarian detailed questions about the procedure or about what to do with your pet's remains. Knowing these things will help you to understand and make the process less traumatic for you and your pet.

Should I be present during Euthanasia?

It is your personal choice whether or not to be present during euthanasia. Many people simply cannot bear to see the moment of their special friend's passing. Others wish to be present to say good-bye, and to prevent feeling guilty for 'abandoning' their pet. Some people choose to stay in the waiting room during the procedure and then briefly view their pet after it has passed away, maybe then spending a few moments in private with their pet. Think over very carefully how you will feel long after your pet has been "put to sleep". Will you have regrets if you do not stay with your pet?

What about In Home Euthanasia?

Some pet caregivers may want to request in home euthanasia for their pet. This is something that you will want to think about and carefully discuss with your veterinarian. Some pets are more relaxed when not 'on their own turf' and having the procedure performed in the office may be a better idea. Otherwise, you can certainly discuss giving your pet a sedative beforehand.

You should also consider possibly having to clean up after the procedure, taking care of the body, as well as the cost involved for your veterinarian to make a house call. Most of the time these visits are after hours and require additional fees. Also, your veterinarian may not agree to euthanize your pet outside of the animal hospital setting. This doesn't mean you can't have it done at home, but you may need to contact another veterinarian who will accommodate your wishes. Just remember, however, that this may also be someone you and your pet are not familiar with and may only increase anxieties.



Preparing For Your Pet's Euthanasia

Burial vs. Cremation

You'll need to decide beforehand about how you want to care for your pet's body after euthanasia. Depending upon where you live, your finances, and other factors, there may be several alternatives for you. You should discuss your options with your veterinarian. Generally, there are two types of cremation procedures and three types of burials:

Individual Cremation: Your pet's body can be cremated at a special facility that cremates pets, and the ashes can be returned to you in a urn either to keep or to scatter at a location you may choose. These types of cremations are usually more expensive than a group cremation. It's also important to note that most pet caregivers are surprised at the small amount of ashes that are returned to them after having their pet individually cremated. However, don't forget that most living creatures are about 95% water.

Group cremation: You may choose to have your pet cremated with other pets. In this case, the ashes are usually not returned and the cost is much less than an individual cremation.

Burial at home: If it is allowed where you live (check your zoning restrictions), you may be able to bury your pet at home. Many people prefer this, but you should consider the fact you may move to a different home in the future.

Communal burial: Sometimes options are limited, and pets may be buried together at a common site. Some pet cemeteries and humane shelters may offer this service.

However you choose to care for your pet's body, you may wish to bring along your pet's toy, coat, etc., to be included in the burial box, if this is allowed. If you will be burying your pet, you will need to make arrangements regarding how you are going to transport your pet from the veterinarian's office to the burial site. Most pet cemeteries offer pickup, but be sure to check when making arrangements. You may also wish to inquire about funeral services, as many pet cemeteries offer this for an extra charge.

Making the Appointment with Your Veterinarian

It's best to schedule the appointment at a time when your veterinarian isn't rushed with other appointments. Requesting the appointment as the last one of the day or the first one in the morning is perfectly acceptable and quite common. Doing so will help you and your pet to be more relaxed. You may ask that your veterinarian provide your pet with some sedation prior to your appointment. This can be administered at home prior to the appointment, at a time specified by your veterinarian. If no prior sedation is given and once in the office your pet needs it, your veterinarian may wish to do so with a fast-acting injection. In a short time the pet will become relaxed and calm.

Preparing For Your Pet's Euthanasia

The Day of the Procedure

Prior to arriving with your pet at your veterinarian's office, you may wish to call and make sure he or she is on schedule. If necessary, once at the office you may want to wait in the car with your pet so that you can be notified to bring your pet directly into the exam room.

The Last Moments

To perform the euthanasia, first a catheter or needle will be inserted into a vein in your pet's front or back leg. Some veterinarians may choose to first inject a drug into the vein which will place your pet in a state of relaxation. Then, the drug used to perform the euthanasia (usually a concentrated solution of pentobarbital) will also be injected into the vein. In most cases, the injection works very quickly (5 seconds), but may be longer with older or sick pets.

The injection causes the pet's heart to stop beating. In some cases, the pet's muscles may relax or contract after the pet has died. Your pet may also void urine and stool. Involuntary contractions of muscles may result in the pet appearing to gasp, or move a leg. Your pet is not aware of any of these things happening, because they happen after their death. In almost all cases, the pet's eyes remain open after death.

Remembrances

After your pet has passed away, you may wish to be with them privately for a few moments. Many pet caregivers also wish to take something with them to remind them of their pet. It may be a lock of hair, a whisker, a clay imprint of the pet's paw, or the pet's collar or nametag. Others may just want to spend a few moments saying their last goodbye. Don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask your veterinarian for this time. Remember too, that it's perfectly normal and acceptable to cry.



Your Aftercare

It is perfectly normal to experience pain and grief after the passing of a special pet. You should take special care of yourself in the time immediately after the euthanasia and for a few days afterward. It will be best if you can have someone else drive you home and share the rest of the day with you, should you otherwise be alone. Understanding the grieving process and having various resources available such as pet loss hotline numbers and books on pet loss can also be beneficial. Chance's Spot has many resources for those who have just lost a pet, including a Pet Loss Message Board and a Support Group that meets every week. Please visit our Web site for more information at: www.chanceSpot.org.



Chance's Spot™

Pet Loss and Support Resources

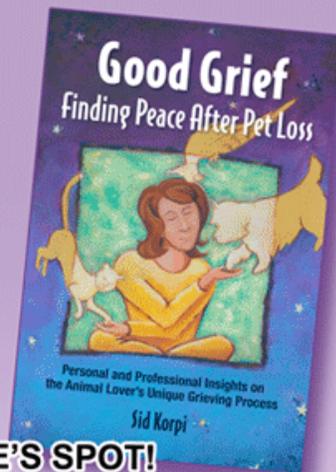
- Pet Loss and End of Life Support
- Support Groups • Loss and Grief Education
- Compassion Fatigue Support

ON SALE NOW AT THE CHANCE'S SPOT WEBSITE!

Good Grief: Finding Peace After Pet Loss

Good Grief: Finding Peace After Pet Loss, by Sid Korpi shows you how to:

- Emotionally prepare for a pet's euthanasia - understand when it's time
- View death not as an ending, but (as animals see it) a natural transformation
- Take care of yourself around insensitive people
- Memorialize and celebrate your pet's life
- Move on after your loss and love again.



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