

Is it Time? Making End of Life Decisions for Pets

By TARA PARKER-POPE MARCH 19, 2019

Pet caregivers can use this Quality of Life Scale to determine whether to continue supportive care for an aging or sick pet or whether euthanasia is a more compassionate option. Move the slider to reflect your pet's score in each category, using a scale of 0 (very poor) to 10 (best). Your score should be based on the pet's quality of life on its own or with whatever level of supportive care works for you.

Hurt

Is your pet's pain successfully managed? Adequate pain control, including breathing ability, is first and foremost on the scale. Is oxygen necessary? **How do you rate your pet's pain and/or breathing? (1 to 10)**

Hunger

Is your pet eating enough? Does hand-feeding help? Does your pet require a feeding tube? **How do you rate your pet's hunger and nutrition? (1 to 10)**

Hydration

Is your pet regularly drinking water? Is your pet dehydrated? If your pet isn't drinking enough, subcutaneous fluids once or twice daily can be used to supplement fluid intake. **How do you rate your pet's interest in water and its level of hydration? (1 to 10)**

Hygiene

Is your pet keeping its coat clean and soft? Is it suffering from pressure sores? Even if a pet can't care for itself, are you able to improve its quality of life by brushing and cleaning its coat, particularly after elimination? **How do you rate your pet's overall hygiene? (1 to 10)**

Happiness

Does your pet express joy and interest? Is your pet responsive to things around him or her (family, toys, etc.)? Is your pet depressed, lonely, anxious, bored or afraid? Can your pet's bed be close to the family activities and not be isolated? **How do you rate your pet's overall happiness? (1 to 10)**

Mobility

Can your pet get up without assistance? Does your pet need human or mechanical help (e.g. a cart)? Does your pet feel like going for a walk? Is your pet having seizures or stumbling? (Note that an animal who has limited mobility due to amputation but is still alert and responsive can still score well on this scale if caregivers are committed to helping the pet.) **How do you rate your pet's mobility? (1 to 10)**

More

Does your pet have more good days than bad? When bad days outnumber good days, quality of life might be compromised. Is a healthy human-animal bond still possible? **Use the scale to rate how consistently your pet has more good days than bad days. (1 to 10)**

Add up a total score, could be 70.

What your score means: If your pet scored higher than 35 on this scale, the score suggests that supportive care likely is still appropriate and that both human and animal are still benefiting from the relationship.

Continue to shower your pet with affection, care and comfort. Look for ways you can continue to improve its quality of life in each category. Can you give fluids or oxygen? Are you able to help your pet with hygiene? Are you able to solve your pet's mobility challenges by carrying it or rearranging its living space? Revisit the scale from time to time to help assess when your pet's quality of life begins to decline.

Note: Pay particular attention to the "Hurt" category. If your pet is struggling with pain and/or breathing, but scoring well in other areas, you should still have a conversation with your vet about the most compassionate course of care for your pet.