

Wellington Veterinary Clinic, Inc.
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Pet Loss and Euthanasia

From the first day you meet your pet, whether it was a stray that found you or a puppy or kitten that you raised, the bond begins to take hold of your heart. It is inevitable. This bond is what makes our relationship with our pets so rewarding. We cannot imagine a time will come when our friend may become old, sick or face a trauma. Unfortunately, these wonderful creatures are not blessed to live as long as we are. Their circle of life is shorter than ours. So many of us are faced with pet loss or have to make a choice of euthanasia.

Here is some information that will hopefully answer some questions to help you at this difficult time.

When is it time for Euthanasia?

Most people want to be assured that their friend is not experiencing pain. In some cases it is hard to say if animals are experiencing pain. They have a built in “mechanism” that helps to mask their pain. We advise our clients to focus on their pets “quality of life“. Such as:

- ◊ Is your pet still eating or drinking?
- ◊ Does your pet still interact with your family, do they still play with a favorite toy, do they want to go for walks or rides?
- ◊ Is your pet able to urinate or defecate in appropriate areas?

Our veterinarian will be able assist you in “quality of life” assessments and may be able to tell if your friend is in pain. You know your friend best of all. Often times he or she will let you know “when it is time”.

Euthanasia-What to expect

Should I be with my pet? A lot of people are unsure if they should be with their pet during euthanasia. This is a personal choice, and you should follow your heart when it comes to this decision. Think about this choice carefully. No one is comfortable with death. If you stay, please know you can express your feelings, and stay with your pet for as long as you need after the procedure. You will never be “in the way”. Your final moments with your pet are very important to us.

What exactly happens? Our veterinarian or technician will place an IV catheter in your pets arm for access to a vein. Sometimes our veterinarian will give a sedative (medication through the IV catheter) to help sedate or calm your pet. When you are ready, our veterinarian will flush the IV catheter with saline solution. He/she then administers the euthanasia solution. The solution acts as an anesthetic and will work quickly to produce a state of unconsciousness—at this time your pet will be unaware and will not feel any pain. Your pet will sometimes take a deep breath, breathe a few more breaths, vocalize, or on occasion lose their bladder or bowels as their body relaxes. This is all normal. It takes a few more seconds to minutes for the heart to stop. One thing people are not aware of is that the eyes will not close after death. The veterinarian will then check for a heartbeat with a stethoscope. If no heartbeat is heard, your pet will be pronounced dead. You may stay with your pet for as long as you need or allow us to take him/her to prepare for cremation or home burial.

Please know that if you chose not to stay with your pet during euthanasia, your friend will be treated with the utmost kindness, respect and dignity.

We offer choices of how you can take care of the remains of your pet. If you choose to take your friend home for burial, we will place your pet in a pet casket. You can place toys, blankets or other items along side your pet as desired.

You may also choose to have your pet cremated with or without the ashes returned to you.

How do I tell my children?

Depending on the child's age, you will need to offer age appropriate explanations:

- Be honest and open. Avoid common terms like "put to sleep", "passed away", or "gone on". These phrases imply they may come back or wake up.
- Explain why euthanasia is necessary. Explain that their suffering is from an illness, accident or old age, "not just a decision" you chose.
- Never blame the veterinarian or staff
- Prepare children ahead of time if possible
- Explain what will happen to pet's remains
- Encourage children's needs to express their feelings; make a scrapbook, draw a picture, etc.
- Don't get a new pet too early. This may imply that their grief is unimportant.

We have brochures and other information available to you.

The stages of grief

After your pet dies you will undoubtedly have one if not all of these stages of grief. The loss can be compared to the loss of a family member. Many people will find it hard to understand. Be assured the pain and grief you feel is real. By understanding the process of grief, you may be better prepared to manage your grief or help family members.

Denial-This may be your first reaction, especially if death is sudden or accidental.

Guilt/anger-Maybe I could or should have done more. You may be mad at the driver who hit your pet. You may be angry at the veterinarian who diagnosed or could not save your pet.

Depression-You may experience a range of emotions, tears, knots in your stomach, or you may not want to do anything. You may need support from others at this point. Don't hesitate to ask. There are support groups for pet loss.

Eventually you will come to **resolution and acceptance**, and these feelings will be replaced with fond memories of your friend!!! Treasure your memories; our friends are with us such a short time, but what an impact each and every one has on us!

"I have sometimes thought of the final cause of dogs having such short lives and I am quite satisfied it is in compassion to the human race; for if we suffer so much in losing a dog after an acquaintance of ten or twelve years, what would it be if they were to live double that time?" Sir Walter Scott

*"Gentle eyes that see so much,
Paws that have the quiet touch
Purrs to signal, "All is well"
And show more love
Than words can tell
Graceful movements touched with pride
A calming presence by our side
A friendship that will last and grow
Small wonder why we love them so."*

Author Unknown