

Dealing With the Most Difficult Decision

Why our pets live such short lives is a question no one can answer. People should get a pet as a kid and grow old with that pet. Dealing with their shorter life spans is the most difficult part of being a pet owner.

Our pets show us unconditional love and are often times the most forgiving beings on the planet. This is more common in dogs but cats can also be very affectionate and also “man’s best friend”.

As our pets age disease incidence rises and progressive and debilitating conditions often occur. Most conditions can be treated or managed well. Some for a very long time, some only a short time. The most common afflictions are kidney disease, heart conditions, arthritis and neurologic impairment.

Fortunately veterinary medicine has the ability to humanely euthanize animals. Unfortunately pet owners have to make the decision on when the time is right to perform that procedure. There is one split second in time when quality of life goes from just adequate to inadequate. We never euthanize at exactly that second and when we miss we always want to miss early. Missing that moment late means we let our pets suffer which is never acceptable.

I realize how difficult the decision is to decide when to euthanize a loved member of your family. The decision has to be made about your pet’s quality of life only. To make this process easier I recommend that every family make a contract that states what factors will decide when your pet’s quality of life is declining and when euthanasia is **best for them**. This contract should contain factors that define your pet’s life. The things they always did and never did, so that when they don’t do the things they always did or start to do what they never did, you know it’s time. When the actions or behaviors change and the contract is met, you’ve already decided and you must follow through and call to euthanize. By doing this ahead of time you eliminate emotions making you wait too long. The worst thing is if your last memory of your pet is that you waited too long and made them suffer.

Below is a template for the contract: