

Considerations

with children

Children may ask to be present for the euthanasia of their pet. This is very normal and acceptable in most instances. Parents will have to decide if it's best to have their children witness. Regardless, children should be offered the truth about what is taking place. Euphemisms like 'put to sleep' or 'passed on' can be confusing and complicate their understanding. It is best to speak slowly and honestly about the process. Knowing what is taking place can lessen fears of the unknown.

with other pets

It is acceptable to have other pets present during the death of a companion. Some may recognize death has occurred while others may not, or at least not show it in ways we sense. Studies show animals have the capacity to mourn the loss of a companion. Talk to your veterinary team about this option, keeping in mind an at-home euthanasia can make it easier for all pets to be present.



"This brochure will help you understand more about euthanasia and how best to honor the bond you share with your pet. Take time to think things through and determine what's important. Your pet trusts you and knows the decisions you make are for their well-being, always."

- Dr. Kathleen Cooney
Founder, CAETA

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Understanding Companion Animal Euthanasia

Your guide for
making preparations



What is Euthanasia?

Euthanasia is the act of humanely ending an animal's life. Most often, euthanasia is achieved by administering an anesthetic overdose that will quickly and gently end all life functions (often in under 2 minutes). Ask questions as you need and trust everyone has your pet's best interest at heart. When done well, your pet will pass peacefully, with little to no pain or anxiety. Euthanasia means 'good death'. To help facilitate this peacefulness, your veterinary team may recommend a sedative be given first to induce sleep.

Decision Making

Knowing when the time may be right for euthanasia is very complicated. Your pet's overall comfort and quality of life will be important to consider. Options in medical care and your ability to provide for their daily care must be reviewed. When no more options are available to prevent suffering, euthanasia becomes a very kind way to release them from their body. Many decisions will need to be made going forward. Your veterinary team is there to help guide and support you through this process.

Memorialization

You may choose to include special features in your pet's euthanasia.

Candles

Special reading

Music

Ceremonial rites

Paw print

Clipping of fur/hair

Planning and Preparations

Who

Reflect on who you want present for your pet's passing: children, other pets, extended family members or friends. Everyone is welcome, but no one is ever made to stay. You may decide to remain present or step away.

When

The right time to choose euthanasia is a combination of when the pet is ready and those wanting to be present are able to be there. Some people want a particular time of day or day of the week. Talk with your veterinary team about their schedule and find the time that works best for everyone, keeping in mind your pet's health and what is best for them. Ask your veterinary team how long their euthanasia appointments typically are. You may want more or less time to say goodbye.

Where

Euthanasia can occur wherever your veterinary team is able to gather. Safety, security, and comfort will be important. Location options include the veterinary hospital, at home, in a nearby secluded park, or other safe space.

When choosing a location, consider such factors as weather, privacy, and post-euthanasia body handling.

Aftercare Preparations

Together with your veterinary team, determine how best to arrange for your pet's body care. Options may include burial (home or cemetery), cremation, aquamation, composting, a necropsy, and more. Much will depend on what is available in your community. Your veterinarian may be able to make arrangements on your behalf or you may wish to connect directly with your preferred local aftercare service. Finalizing details before euthanasia will minimize decision-making after.

Grief Support

It is important to take care of yourself before, during, and after the euthanasia of your beloved pet. Surround yourself with people who understand your bond and how difficult this loss may be. Ask your veterinary team about pet loss support groups in the area and locate books and other resources to assist you in your grief. Remember, you are not alone. Your pet is special and their loss may be overwhelming.

Options Beyond Euthanasia

There may be conflict within your group of caregivers regarding when the time is right for euthanasia. It is good to explore all options in palliative (non-curative/comfort care) medicine and consider everyone's goals and concerns. If euthanasia is not acceptable based on religious, spiritual, or personal preferences, talk with your veterinary team about animal hospice care.

Making the decision to say goodbye to a special friend is very hard and can be very complicated. Take your time. Think about what is important to you, your pet, and everyone who loves them. And thank you for the care and devotion you've given throughout their life.

