



Client Information Sheet

EUTHANASIA

Nothing really prepares us for the death of our pet. Whether death is fast and unexpected or whether it comes at the end of an ongoing illness or deterioration of health it is always a very difficult time. Our pets are a big part of our lives and it is very hard to say goodbye especially after all their years of unconditional love. They become a big part of our family and it is hard to imagine being without them. We all secretly hope that when the time comes our pet will have a pain free death and die peacefully in its sleep. Sometimes this is the way it happens, however in many cases a decision to euthanase to end our pets suffering needs to be made.

The decision to end an animals life is never easy. It comes about when a pets quality of life has deteriorated to an unacceptable level. It takes a great deal of courage to take this step and to put your pets welfare ahead of your own emotions. There is always a tendency to hold on for just that bit longer in the hope that they may improve or get better. One of the hardest parts of deciding to euthanase your pet is finding the right time. In reality there is never a right time, and you know your own pet better than anyone. Quality of life is one of the biggest considerations and below are a few things you need to consider when thinking about euthanasia and deciding if it is the right thing to do.

- What is the quality of my pets life?
- Does my pet have a malignant tumour, terminal condition or serious injury
- Is my pet still eating and drinking normally?
- Is my pet still active or playful?
- Is my pet still affectionate towards me?
- Is my pet able to toilet normally and by itself or does it require assistance?
- Is my pet toileting in unusual places or more frequently?
- Is my pet able to get comfortable or is it restless?
- Is my pet unwilling to move around?
- Does my pet seem lethargic and uninterested?
- Is my pet able to hold its head up?
- Is my pet in pain?



Euthanasia of a pet is not a decision that should be taken lightly. To help you prepare for this decision consider the above questions and ensure you discuss any concerns or questions with your veterinarian who will endeavour to give you all of the information they can. Veterinarians do not consider an option for euthanasia lightly. Their training and profession is dedicated to diagnosing and treating animals. They are very aware of the balance between extending an animals life with some quality and its suffering. In making the decision to euthanase it is important to remember that the welfare of the animal is the prime consideration.

Reaching the decision to have a pet put down is probably the most difficult decision a pet owner can make. There is a great deal of emotion involved including grief, guilt, dread, anxiety and regret. It is not unusual to resent having to make a decision and being angry at our pet for forcing our hand. It is common to try and postpone making a decision, bargaining that if we wait another day the decision may not be necessary. Once again we must remember that amongst all this emotion our pets well being is the most important consideration. This decision is even more difficult when your pet has been a part of your life for several years. In these cases what matters to the pet is quality of life not length as your pet has little concept of time. There needs to be a realisation that there will be a point at which time your pet no longer enjoys life.

Sometimes it is possible to delay euthanasia for a day without causing excess suffering (ie when your pet has a terminal illness or is old) and in these cases a euthanasia can be planned. It might be nice to give your pet its favourite foods and some pampering. Enjoy your time together, let your pet know they were well loved and say goodbye. However if your pet is suffering or already under an anaesthetic this is not a good option as it will prolong their suffering and they will not enjoy their last moments.

What is it and how does it happen

Euthanasia is the induction of a painless death and literally means 'gentle death.' Other terms commonly used are 'put to sleep' or 'put down.' It is given by an injection into the vein of a high dose of an anaesthetic agent. A small area of hair is clipped from their forearm. Your animal will not know it is going to happen. If you are upset they will detect this but otherwise they will not realize this is any different to a normal visit to the vet. They may feel some discomfort as the needle passes through the skin but not more than they would for any normal injection. It will only take a few seconds for your animal to lose consciousness and soon after this your animal ceases to breathe and their heart will stop beating.

If you are holding your pet you will feel them relax, exhale and become heavier. Urine may trickle from their bladder as muscles relax. Sometimes they may let out a couple of big breaths afterwards-this is their muscles relaxing. The veterinarian will check for a heart beat and pulse and/or an eyelid flick reflex. If there is any possibility your animal is only deeply unconscious the veterinarian will administer a second injection. Your pet will not be aware of this. Animals do not normally close their eyes. The following is a list of things you need to think about when you have made the decision to euthanase your pet.

- Do I wish to be present for the euthanasia or would I prefer to wait in reception or not wait at all
- Do I want a friend or family member with me
- What burial arrangements am I going to make-home burial, cremation or leave with the Vet Clinic

Should I stay until the end.

In most instances the veterinarian will allow you to stay during a euthanasia if you wish. Occasionally they may request you not be present-this usually because your are so distressed that this will upset your pet and make it harder to handle and impossible for your Vet to perform the euthanasia. This makes things more traumatic for all concerned. Staying during a euthanasia is a very personal decision. Some owners may feel its their duty to stay, others may prefer not to be present. It is a good idea to decide what you would prefer to do and whether you would like a friend or family member to be there with you. Your vet understands this is a difficult time for you. The best thing you can do is try to remain calm, helping to reassure your pet and help make the end nice and peaceful.

There are many owners who chose not to be present for a variety of reasons. There is absolutely no shame in this-it is an individual choice and no-one will think any less of you for this choice. If you do not want to be present your Vet will allow you to have some time to say goodbye to your pet. Your pet will be treated with the same respect and dignity whether you are present or not.

The Vet will normally place your pet's body in a black bag. This is not a sign of disrespect it is for your own hygiene and privacy. There is the option of a nice material bag to wrap your pet's body in for an extra charge. If you wish to use these please inform the staff prior to euthanasia so they can be arranged. You may also bring your own towel or blanket to place the body in if you prefer.

After the euthanasia you will be given a few minutes alone to sit with your pet and regain your composure if you wish. If you do need some time before you leave the clinic let the staff know. There is no shame in showing emotions at this time. It is natural and understandable and no-one will think any less of you for doing so. If there is anything staff can do to assist you at this time please do not hesitate to let them know.

Can I have my pet euthanased at home?

In some circumstances we can arrange to euthanase your pet in your own home. Home euthanasias do attract a higher fee as the vet and an assistant have to travel to your home for these and they are not generally done afterhours or on weekends unless there are exceptional circumstances. Aggressive dogs are not generally euthanased at home. If you are considering a home euthanasia talk to the Vet Clinic to see whether we can arrange a home euthanasia for you.



Deciding on a final resting place.

This is a decision which should be decided upon before euthanasia if possible. Make sure you talk to other family members and come to a decision. Your vet can give you further information on the different choices if you would like. The main options are burial at home or a pet cemetery, cremation or burial arranged by the Veterinary clinic. If deciding on cremation it must be paid for in full before we are able to send your pet's body for cremation. We are able to hold your pet's body until such time that it is. There are a number of different cremation options available-ask staff for more information.

Do Pets Grieve?

Yes animals can grieve as they often form strong attachments with each other. Grieving pets can exhibit signs such as restlessness, inappetance, depression, lethargy, anxiety. You can help grieving pets by trying to keep routines as normal as possible. Try not to intentionally change behaviour or give them more attention than usual-this can exacerbate the problem. Allow remaining animals to work out a new pecking order. Some people welcome a younger pet into their homes as the end of their elderly pet's life is approaching. This can give old pets a new lease on life and when the end does finally come it can help you deal better with the sense of loss.

After the decision

Everyone grieves differently after the loss of a pet. Some people want to acquire a new pet soon after, others can get offended at the suggestion feeling that they would be disloyal and could not replace their loved pet. Do not rush into finding a new pet and make sure you are ready when you do. If there is anything we here at Latrobe Vet Group can do to help you at this difficult time please let us know.