



THINGS YOU SHOULD CONSIDER

Make sure you discuss your situation with your veterinarian and that he or she knows what direction you want to go in (i.e., that you want to keep your pet comfortable at home as long as he is comfortable) — but only you know what your limitations are.

- Deciding to provide palliative care to a pet is something the whole family must agree on. The choice can be a costly one — both emotionally and financially — so everyone must be on board.
- Palliative care is an unpredictable process. You will have to be prepared to make quick decisions if your pet is in pain or if his condition changes suddenly. Remember that your only obligation is to make the best choices for your pet, and that may not always involve continuing with palliative care until the very end.
- Realize the role of guilt. Don't avoid or delay humane euthanasia because you feel guilty. Remember that it can be the right decision for your pet in the end.
- Finally, realize that doing nothing is not an option. If you choose to administer palliative care to your animal, remember it doesn't mean allowing a pet to die at home without proper care and attention. To do so would be neglect and you could be criminally charged for not providing adequate care or for willfully causing unnecessary pain and suffering to an animal.



**HUMANE
SOCIETY**
LONDON & MIDDLESEX

End of Life Care for Your Pet

For further information
or questions, please
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Being a pet owner can involve difficult decisions, and perhaps none more so than when you are dealing with a pet that is dying.

WHEN YOUR PET IS DYING

When a pet becomes a part of our family, it brings joy, companionship and comfort. In return, it needs love, care and devotion, and it may sometimes require an ethical or moral choice be made on its behalf. Being a pet owner can involve difficult decisions, and perhaps none more so than when you are dealing with a pet that is dying.

WHAT ARE YOUR OPTIONS?

If your pet has been diagnosed with a terminal illness or has begun to suffer increasingly from age-related ailments, humane euthanasia may eventually be the only option you have. Most people want to have as much time as possible with their pet before they have to say a final goodbye. Many believe that they can provide their pet with a good quality of life for some time to come. Your role is to recognize suffering and to provide care and relief to your animal, whether through medical means or through euthanasia. As long as you are able to ensure that your pet is receiving the care that it needs during its remaining days, it may be possible to give your pet more time. But whether or not you decide to either delay or rule out euthanasia, you are always responsible for providing care to your animal.

WHAT IS PALLIATIVE CARE?

In human health, the medical care or treatment of someone who is dying is called palliative care. We administer palliative care to relieve that person's pain or to slow down the progress of their illness. Palliative care is about comfort — it is not about cure.

When an animal is dying, palliative care is much the same — you're not just letting a dying pet live out its remaining days; rather, you're making sure that your pet's suffering is alleviated and that it is comfortable all the while.

If you are thinking about palliative care for your dying pet, there are many practical issues that you should think about, and many questions that you should ask yourself before you decide to go this route.

Your veterinarian will play a large role in the process. If you don't have a vet, it's your duty to get one so you can make informed decisions about the health of your animal.

IS PALLIATIVE CARE THE RIGHT CHOICE?

Most importantly, you need to ask yourself who you are doing this for. As heartbreaking as losing a pet may be, you must always make sure that you are placing your pet's welfare ahead of your own emotions.

For humans, palliative care is closely supervised by medical professionals, and the patient himself can indicate his wishes with regard to treatment. Patients often receive care in the hospital; if they are at home, their family members are often supported by special care workers, such as nurses and social workers. Unfortunately, support networks for people dealing with dying animals tend to be much smaller. While your veterinarian will provide you with veterinary support and guidance, you will likely be your pet's primary caretaker and decision maker. Only you know how much you are capable of handling, and for how long.

WHAT KIND OF CARE IS REQUIRED FOR A DYING ANIMAL?

In the earlier stages of a terminal illness, or when you are dealing with an animal of a very advanced age, care requirements may be relatively straight-forward. You may be taking your pet to the veterinarian more frequently to have its condition assessed, or you may be administering more pain medication. Your veterinarian can ensure that the treatment your pet is receiving at home continues to be appropriate.

However, as your pet's illness progresses, the care it requires may become much more complicated, time consuming and costly. You may or will have to:

- Consult with a veterinarian to ensure that your pet's medical needs continue to be met and its health constantly monitored.
- Continue to provide the ongoing nursing your pet needs, usually by yourself (or with family support).
- Recognize signs of pain or illness in your animal, realizing that animals can be quite good at hiding symptoms — learn to look for changes in behaviour, diet, digestion, posture, temperature and weight.
- Diligently supervise interaction with other animals and/or children in the home.
- Provide a special sleeping area that may have to be elevated, or involve extra padding or cushions to regulate body temperature.
- Have someone be home constantly to monitor your pet's condition and ensure constant supervision.
- Participate in modified playtime (no matter how delicate the animal's condition) in order to keep your pet alert.
- Groom your pet if it is no longer able to groom itself, including providing regular baths, nail trimming, and removing hair mats and tangles.
- Take your pet outside to defecate or urinate as often as hourly, and/or clean your animal if it has soiled itself.
- Ensure that, if your pet is immobile, it is turned regularly to avoid bedsores.
- Hand feed or hydrate your animal as often as every few hours.
- Be prepared to obtain veterinary intervention at any time, day or night, if your pet is in distress.