



EUTHANASIA

There are some circumstances in which your vet may suggest, after thorough assessment of your pet and consultation with you that euthanasia needs to be considered. This option can be a great mercy to animals with terminal illness or intractable pain. This will enable your pet to die in peace, with dignity and without further suffering. It can be a very hard decision to make but it is one of the kindest things that an owner can do for an animal suffering from unmanageable discomfort.

What happens when a pet is euthanased?

The vet, with the assistance of a veterinary nurse, gives the pet an intravenous injection of a lethal dose of barbiturate (a strong anaesthetic) usually into a vein in a front leg. In tiny pets and birds the injection may be given into a major organ. The animal relaxes into unconsciousness within a few seconds and the heart stops soon afterward. This is a very controlled and painless method of euthanasia. Nervous animals can be given a sedative to calm them prior to euthanasia.

Is it usual for the owner to stay with their pet when it is euthanased?

Vets accept that owners vary in their wish to remain with their pet. The vast majority of animals' euthanased in this hospital are carried out with the pet in their owner's arms or being petted and soothed by their owner and a nurse. When owners are so distressed that this is communicated to the pet, it may be preferable to leave them with the vet and nurse who will calmly cuddle and comfort the animal as he "goes to sleep". If the owners wish, they can see the pet after the injection has been given but many people prefer their last memory to be of their pet alive.

Sometimes the decision to euthanase the pet is made after they have been anaesthetised for an exploratory operation to assess for the presence of cancer which is found to be inoperable. Under these circumstances it is most humane to put the animal to sleep whilst still under the anaesthetic, rather than subjecting them to the discomfort of recovering from surgery prior to euthanasia.

Can I have my pet put to sleep at home or is it better to take him to the surgery?

We do offer home visits to put your pet to sleep in their home surrounded by their family. This needs to be scheduled in advance if possible.

We can also arrange an appointment at the surgery at a quiet time to avoid undue distress to both pet and owner.

What can I do with my pet's remains?

Choices include: -

- Home burial. Many people who own their home find this helps the grieving process when practical.
- Bush Burial. The veterinary surgery arranges for the pet to be collected by "Bush Burials" for burial on a peaceful farm near Hall.
- Individual cremation with return of the pet's ashes by "Pets at Peace". The cost is \$250
- Pet cemetery burial where you can visit your pet's grave – we can suggest who to contact to arrange this.

Grieving for your pet

It is very natural to feel upset and emotional when your pet dies. Don't be afraid to show your feelings in front of the vet. He/she will understand. It will take time to get over your loss. It often helps to talk about your pet's death. It is quite normal to feel angry; this is part of the grieving process. Try not to feel guilty or blame yourself or others for your pet's death. Remember that you cared for your pet and did all you could when they were ill. Vets cannot save every pet's life. Treasure your memories and photographs. Remember the good times and what you loved most about your pet. If you feel you have no one to talk to about your loss talk to us and if necessary, we can refer you to a grief counselling service. We have a information sheet called "Coping with the loss of your pet" which may be of some comfort and supplies web addresses for further information.

Helping children to cope

The death of a pet is often a child's first experience of death. Tell them the truth. Encourage them to talk about their feelings and tell them how you feel. Help them to understand that they are not to blame. Talk to them about your pet and concentrate on the good times. Don't get a new pet too soon. You all need time to get over the death of the previous pet.

If you or your child are finding the grieving process difficult, perhaps a phone call to a counsellor may help.

Sydney-based David Foote is a veterinarian who has also trained in bereavement counselling and is happy to arrange a phone consultation with you. He can also with decision making for pet euthanasia and coping with pet terminal illness.

He can be contacted at <http://www.davidfoote.com.au/> or on 0425 281 424

Disclaimer: *This information is of a general nature only, and must not be used as veterinary advice except where directed by your veterinarian. Hall Veterinary Surgery does not warrant the suitability of this information for specific cases. If your animal is unwell or you want to act on this information, please contact us on 6230 2223.*