



Humane Euthanasia: How Do You Know When It's Time?

Knowing when to humanely euthanize a beloved pet is a difficult decision. You love your dog or cat companion, and you want what is best for them. No one wants to see their pet suffering or not enjoying a good quality-of-life. So, how do you know when it's time to say goodbye? At Ely Veterinary Care (EVC), we get asked this question a lot by pet owners. Before we answer this question, we perform a complete physical exam on your pet so that we can identify any potential areas of concern and address them with you. In some cases, we may recommend lab work such as a blood panel, urinalysis, or imaging to get a better gauge of your pet's overall health. We would recommend these tests only if we felt that what we might find would be treatable or if there may be ways in which we could make your pet more comfortable, such as with the prescription of anti-inflammatory or pain medications and supplements. We will also ask questions to better evaluate your pet's condition at home. These questions include:

Quality-of-Life Questions:

1. Is your pet still eating and drinking normally?
2. Does your pet have trouble with mobility (walking, going up or down stairs, getting up from a sitting position, etc.)?
3. Is your pet fecal or urinary incontinent?

If most of your answers to these questions are negative, this indicates a poor quality-of-life for your pet, and we will likely recommend humane euthanasia as the best option. If we both agree that humane euthanasia is the kindest option for your pet, we can assist you with this procedure. We can perform a humane euthanasia either at the time of your pet's quality-of-life appointment, or we can schedule the humane euthanasia for a different day of your choosing to be performed in the clinic or at your home. For a breakdown of the humane euthanasia process, please see the outline below:

The Humane Euthanasia Process at EVC:

1. If you feel as though your pet may need to be humanely euthanized, please call our office to schedule a quality-of-life exam to be performed either in-clinic or at your home.
2. If after the quality-of-life exam we decide that the kindest option for your pet is humane euthanasia, this can be performed immediately or rescheduled for a more accommodating time for you and your family (pending your pet's condition).
3. You will sign a euthanasia consent form, which gives us permission to perform the procedure. During this time, we will also ask you for your aftercare preferences.



Options include taking your pet home for burial, private vs. communal cremation, or storage and proper disposal of your beloved pet by our facility. If you elect cremation for your pet, you will also be given options for acquiring memorabilia such as ink or clay paw prints, as well as urn selection. You may also pay for the procedure at this time or wait until after the humane euthanasia is completed.

4. We will place an IV catheter whenever possible so that we have direct access to a vein for sedation. If we are unable to place a catheter due to patient dehydration or blood flow issues, we will administer the sedation in the muscle, which can sting slightly but helps the patient to relax in preparation for the euthanasia solution. Prior to sedation, we will advise you of potential but rare side effects that can occur following the injection.
5. Once your pet is relaxed and sleeping peacefully, we will give the euthanasia solution through the IV catheter (in a vein). Once given, your pet's heart rate and breathing will slow until the heart stops beating. This process is quick and painless.
6. We will confirm that there is no longer a heartbeat, chest movements, or an eye reflex present. The absence of these signs confirms your pet's death and ensures no additional euthanasia solution needs to be administered.
7. Once complete, your aftercare wishes for your pet will be carried out. If you elected cremation for your pet, your pet's ashes will either be mailed to your home, or we will contact you once your pet's ashes return to the clinic. The cremation process can take up to several weeks to finalize.

As discussed previously, knowing when it is time for humane euthanasia is a difficult and emotional decision. We are here to help you in any way that we can. Please contact us with any questions or concerns you may have. You and your family are in our thoughts and prayers.

*For access to free virtual pet loss support groups via Zoom meetings, please visit the Lap of Love website at: <https://www.lapoflove.com/our-services/pet-loss-support>