

CONSIDERING YOUR PET'S QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE MIDST OF DISEASE

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“Quality of life” is a frequent term used to assess how an animal is doing in the midst of disease.

You know your pet the best, and are the expert regarding the quality of its life. Your evaluation will probably occur multiple times throughout your animal's illness. If there are other people who also love this animal, it may be helpful, especially with children, to involve them in some discussions regarding quality as you are faced with decisions.

Here are some ideas of how to objectively gauge quality:

- First, take a moment and decide how you define quality in terms of living with quality.
- Truthfully, answer some key questions such as:
- Is your pet eating and drinking normally?
- Can it relieve itself on its own?
- Can your pet move around on its own?
- Is your pet interested in the activities around it? Is
- your pet withdrawn much of the time?

It can be helpful to understand the differences between pain and suffering as you are making assessments of quality in your pet's life.

Pain is a physical and emotional sensation that can be complicated to assess. Keep in mind, a pet's reaction to pain is dependent upon its personality and the degree of pain it's experiencing. Ask your veterinarian what signs your pet may display to indicate pain.

Suffering is more than physical attributes, and involves the ability to enjoy living life. Use the above tools to help decide if important qualities are diminishing or are no longer present in your pet's life. These may help you to define what suffering would be for your pet and create a plan to prevent or limit any suffering.

MEASURING QUALITY OF LIFE

You might also consider some of the following suggestions to help gain an even deeper understanding of your pet's current quality of life.

CREATE A LIST OF YOUR PET'S UNIQUE QUALITIES

Your pet is a very special individual with their own special customs. These are a few general ideas to help you get started on your own list:

- Chasing a ball
- Playing with other pets
- Greeting you at the door
- Playing with toys
- Wanting to go for walks
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Usual habits like scratching on a post and rubbing your legs or barking at a neighbor

As your pet's disease progresses, and these qualities fade, mark them off the list. Decide early on how many you will allow to go before too much quality diminishes from your pet's day-to-day life.

KEEP A GOOD DAY/BAD DAY CALENDAR

Evaluate what a good day would be for your pet, and also what a bad day looks like. Each evening, recall the day and decide if it was a good or bad day, marking a calendar with a happy face or a sad face. Decide how many bad days in a row occur before quality is compromised.

You also can use a marble jar for this same purpose. For each good day, a marble is placed in a jar. For every bad day, a marble is removed from the jar.

KEEP A JOURNAL

Keep a daily record of events in your and your pet's life. This will help you look back and reflect on changes that occur and how your life is affected.

ASSESSING YOUR OWN QUALITY OF LIFE

As you consider the phrase "quality of life," remember this pertains to the quality of your pet's life as well as your own. It is important to also think of your own needs during this time.

Here are some questions to ask yourself that can help you keep track of your quality of life:

- How much of my time will go toward taking care of my pet? How much time do I have to spare?
- What cost will I incur to take care of my pet? What other financial responsibilities do I have?
- What other responsibilities do I have in my life (job, parenting)? Who else do I need to consider (partner, Children, other pets)?
- Who can help me?
- What other stresses and obligations do I have in my life right now?

Assessing your own life does not diminish the love or care you are giving to your pet, but rather emphasizes which priorities need to be tended to and in which order. While it can be very hard to make difficult decisions based on financial or other limitations, it is important to take care of yourself and also remember that you have done and are still doing the best that you can for your pet.