



EUTHANASIA

In some circumstances your vet may suggest that you should consider having your pet "put to sleep" (euthanased) such as if your pet has a terminal illness from which he cannot recover or if he has 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 a suffering pet.

What happens when a pet is "put to sleep"?

The vet, with the assistance of a veterinary nurse, gives the pet an intravenous injection of a lethal dose of barbiturates (a strong anesthetic) usually into a front leg. Sometimes the injection is made into a kidney. The pet loses consciousness within a few seconds and often gives a last gasp just before it dies. This is a very controlled and painless method of euthanasia. For very nervous pets it is sometimes necessary to give a sedative to calm them prior to euthanasia.

Is it usual for the owner to stay with their pet when it is "put to sleep"?

Most vets are quite happy for owners to remain with their pet. Sometimes owners get very distressed and this is easily passed on to the pet and in this instance it may be preferable for the pet to be left with the vet and nurse. If the owners wish, they can see their pet's body after the injection has been given but many people prefer their last memory to be of their pet alive.

The decision whether or not to stay with the pet is a very personal decision which should preferably be made in advance to avoid further distress.

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

If your vet offers home visits then they may be willing to put your pet to sleep at home. This can be expensive because you have to pay for the vet's and his nurse's time for the period they are away from the surgery. It is not always practical for both the vet and nurse to come and some vets no longer offer home visits except in cases of emergency. At the surgery skilled assistance and equipment is readily available. It is usually possible to 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 body?

There are three possible choices:-

- Home burial
- Cremation - this is the most common option arranged through a veterinary practice
- Individual cremation with return of the pet's ashes - your vet can arrange this and advise about the likely cost.



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, they 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 process of coming to terms with your loss. Try not to feel guilty or blame yourself or your vet for your pet's death. Remember that you cared for your pet and did all you could when it was ill. Vets cannot always save a pet's life. Treasure your memories. 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 you can contact The Pet Bereavement Support Service on 0800 096 6606 (UK only including Northern Ireland). The support line is open from 8.30am - 8.30pm everyday. All calls are free and confidential from a landline. If calling from a mobile phone, some phone networks may charge. Alternatively you can also email the Pet Bereavement Support Service on pbssmail@bluecross.org.uk.

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. Your child will need time to get over the death of the old pet.

Further reading

Death of an Animal Friend; Society for Companion Animal Studies.

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