

# Euthanasia

**Euthanasia of your horse can be a difficult and emotional decision to make. You're likely to need to take some time with the decision.**

In horses that are unwell for a prolonged period, or horses of advanced age, euthanasia can be the kindest option for our beloved pets. It enables them to die without prolonged pain or suffering and gives them dignity in death, as well as offering you peace of mind that you have done the right thing for your pet.

Your vet will always be happy to discuss this decision with you. When it's not an emergency situation, it is a decision that has to be made by you and your vet will only advise and support your decision, rather than making the decision for you. However, in emergency situations, euthanasia may be a necessary course of action.

There are other support services available. The BHS, for example, offer a 'friend at the end' service in which a trained individual can discuss your options with you and help support your decision.

## METHODS OF EUTHANASIA

### Euthanasia by Injection

Euthanasia can be performed by injection. The product that is used is called somulose and horses will often be sedated first to ensure they stay calm throughout the procedure. Sometimes, the vet will then place a catheter in the jugular (neck vein) of the horse. Some vets will inject the solution directly from a needle. Either method is acceptable and it is up to the individual vet.

Somulose is injected slowly, usually while the horse is held by you or someone you nominate. Once the injection has been completed, the vet will take charge of your horse, holding them until they fall to the floor. The injection is an anaesthetic and the horse will initially become unconscious as the anaesthetic works on their brain. Once asleep the second part of the injection acts on the horse's heart causing it to stop. Sometimes this can take a few minutes, but the horse remains asleep and peaceful and is completely unaware of what is happening. This method of euthanasia allows the owner to be present if they want to be, it is not stressful for the animal at all and allows a peaceful death with dignity and calm.



### Euthanasia by shooting

Euthanasia can be done by a vet who has a gun or by another licensed person, such as a fallen stock collection service. It is imperative that this is done by a professional to ensure it is humane and problem free. This method is used for horses who are excessively needle phobic or if the owner wishes the carcass to be used by a hunt kennels for meat. Death is instantaneous and some owners like the immediacy of this option.

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## DISPOSAL OPTIONS

**Cremation** – This can be arranged with a local fallen stock collection service. Most of these services offer an individual cremation, enabling owners to keep their ashes in a casket or box or to have the ability to scatter them as they wish. Normal cremation will dispose of the body without the option to have the ashes returned.



**Hunt Kennels or Local Zoo** - If the animal is shot and not injected with lethal injection then they can be used to feed hounds or zoo animals. If the owner wishes for this option, it is best to organise this prior to the euthanasia.

**Burial** - Horses who are considered to be pets can be buried on privately owned land, this is not the case for animals in a business situation such as a riding school. Horses should also not be buried near to water courses. Because of legal restrictions on burial options, cremation is probably now the more usual option.

**Making this decision takes a lot of thought and soul searching. Give us a call to talk it through and find out what the options are. We would be happy to help you reach the decision that is right for you and your horse.**