

Assessing Quality of Life

Quality of life (QOL) is the extent to which a beloved pet is comfortable and able to participate in or enjoy life. In humans as well as animals, quality of life encompasses emotional, physical, and social well-being. QOL is highly subjective in that it varies from animal to animal, and strongly relies on the perception of their owner. Therefore, what may be considered a poor quality of life for one pet, may be satisfactory for another. For our companion animals, we are entrusted to be the ones to assess this. Below are several options to assist in making the best determination for your loved one.

Quality of Life Scales

One tool to use is a quality of life scale as it offers some objectivity in evaluating the basic functions of your pet's activities of daily living and overall happiness. You can track different categories over time to monitor any declines to discuss with your pet's medical team. There are multiple scales to choose from that help determine your pet's comfort level on a numeric basis. We have included one in this packet, along with a diary, for you to utilize as needed.

Issues to Watch For

- ♥ Exhibiting pain (ex: restless, excessive panting, hiding, whining)
- ♥ Having trouble breathing
- ♥ Not eating/drinking normally
- ♥ No longer urinating or defecating normally
- ♥ Unresponsive to favorite people, activities, or toys
- ♥ Appearing depressed, anxious or afraid
- ♥ Unable to move around without assistance
- ♥ Seeking out new, unusual places to sleep or hide
- ♥ Experiencing new onset seizures or aggression

Other Things to Consider

- ♥ Make a list of 3-4 things that make your pet who they are. What activities do they enjoy the most? What food do they like the best? What toys can they not live without? When your pet can no longer do these key things that make them who they are, it may be time to consider humane euthanasia.
- ♥ Look back at photos or cell phone videos of your pet prior to the illness or injury. How do they look? How are they acting? How have they transformed over time? Sometimes, changes are gradual and more difficult to recognize; looking back helps.
- ♥ Ask trusted friends, family members, and/or your pet's primary veterinarian for their perspective and begin to have preliminary conversations about humane euthanasia.
- ♥ Reflect on YOUR quality of life. Are you constantly worried? Is the stress of your pet's needs affecting your relationships with your pet or others? Is the current level of care (including time and financial demands) sustainable for your family?
- ♥ Reach out to a friendly Veterinary Social Worker to process your thoughts, feelings, and likely anticipatory grief.

Our Social Work Team is always available to support & partner with you.

Information adapted from: vet.osu.edu

©2021 Hacker & Nisbet

Quality of Life Scale

Give a score to each category, with 0 being unacceptable and 10 being excellent

SCORE	CRITERION
0-10	HURT / PAIN - Adequate pain control & breathing ability is of top concern. Trouble breathing outweighs all concerns. Is the pet's pain well managed? Can the pet breathe properly? Is oxygen supplementation necessary?
0-10	HUNGER - Is the pet eating enough? Does hand-feeding help? Does the pet need a feeding tube?
0-10	HYDRATION - Is the pet dehydrated? For patients not drinking enough water, use subcutaneous fluids once to twice daily to supplement fluid intake.
0-10	HYGIENE - The pet should be brushed and cleaned, particularly after eliminations. Avoid pressure sores with soft bedding and keep all wounds clean.
0-10	HAPPINESS - Does the pet express joy and interest? Is the pet responsive to family, toys, etc.? Are they able to do their usual activities of daily living (such as walks, ball play, etc.)? Is the pet depressed, lonely, anxious, bored or afraid? Can the pet's bed be moved to be close to family activities?
0-10	MOBILITY - Can the pet get up without assistance? Does the pet need human or mechanical help (e.g., a cart)? Does the pet feel like going for a walk? Is the pet having seizures or stumbling?
0-10	MORE GOOD DAYS THAN BAD - When bad days outnumber good days, quality of life might be too compromised. When a healthy human-animal bond is no longer possible, the caregiver must be made aware that the end is near.

TOTAL: A total over 35 points represents acceptable quality of life. If the total is below 35, then every effort should be made to improve any areas that can be improved. If additional improvement is not possible, then humane euthanasia should be considered.

Original concept, *Oncology Outlook*, by Dr. Alice Villalobos, *Quality of Life Scale Helps Make Final Call*, VPN, 09/2004; scale format created for author's book, *Canine and Feline Geriatric Oncology: Honoring the Human- Animal Bond*, Blackwell Publishing, 2007. Revised for International Veterinary Association of Pain Management (IVAPM) 2011 Hospice Statement. Reprinted with permission from Dr. Alice Billalobos & Wiley-Blackwell.

Weekly Quality of Life Assessment Diary

0-10	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Hurt/Pain							
Hunger							
Hydration							
Hygiene							
Happiness							
Mobility							
More Good Days than Bad							
TOTAL OOL SCORE							