

How will I know when it's time?



R.A.I.N.B.O.W. Scale[®]

Assessing your pet's quality of life

513-489-PAWS

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As pet's age, they slow down and enjoy a different lifestyle. Gone are the days where they wrestle and tear through the house! Now they spend more time snoring in their favorite spot how bittersweet that is! Still, old age is not a disease and recognizing the difference between the natural slowing of life versus "the suffering" of a terminal disease is a responsibility most pet parents feel compelled to understand.

Pet's mask pain, making it difficult for pet parents to know if their pet is suffering. Why do pets mask pain? They are very in tune with their DNA and animal instinct, knowing that they could become prey if they show any weakness. As a result, pets tend to be long suffering and don't vocalize their discomfort.

As pets begin to experience the health impact of aging or of a life threatening disease, pet parents begin to wrestle with the question of "When is it time?" ... to end their suffering?... to help them transition from this life to the next? ...to send them to the rainbow bridge? Since that is the number one question I receive as a pet loss professional, I have used the acronym of R.A.I.N.B.O.W. Scale® to help pet parents judge their pet's quality of life and to enhance their pet's quality of life as they transition to getting older.

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Founder and CEO

Pictured with the real CEO of Angel's Paws - Itsy

Routine

Pets that were typically affectionate and cuddly can become independent and reclusive. Conversely, pets that were "not lap pets" become clingy. If mobility is difficult for these pets, then pet parents report that their pets follow them everywhere with their eyes. Additionally, pet parents report their pet shows up in places they've never seen them before. They are found sleeping in different spots or engaging in unusual behavior... for example, suddenly getting in the shower with you when they "hated" water before.

Attitude

This is the "happiness" quotient. Pets demonstrate their affection through a variety of means: tail wagging, smiling, greetings and overall energy. A decline in interest in activities of daily living (i.e. walks, dinner time, "the refrigerator," company, playing with sibling pets, car rides, treats, etc). Pet parents know a brightness in the eye when the pet is "happy" versus "sad." Tails down and lethargy are tell tale signs a pet is not enjoying life.

Incontinence

Loss of bowel and bladder control are common aspects of aging and disease. There are many reasons for this. Physical changes in the body's natural elasticity and ability to retain bodily fluids can occur. Additionally, other physical limitations such as the ability to walk outside, and the ability to assume "the stance" for elimination due to the pain of arthritis can change long held habits. Pets have dignity and this is hard for them as well. Punishing them or yelling at them will not help. They are not doing this on purpose! Cats may urinate outside the litter box and even wait to do it right in front of you or in your favorite spot so you can't miss it. Often this is intentional to alert you that they have a medical problem. Taking a urine sample in to your vet may result in the discovery of a urinary tract infection that a prescription could help.

Nutrition

Let's face it; food makes life interesting...especially if you are a pet! Eating is probably something that your pet enthusiastically embraced. Even finicky eaters usually have a way of communicating what they like. But there comes a point in the cycle of life where eating takes on a different role. It can be challenging to watch your pets appetite decline as he ages. Certain diets may be necessary for managing an illness or you may have to get more creative to keep them interested in eating. Eventually as the body begins to shut down, the organs responsible for processing food slow down and will stop sending hunger signals to the brain. When we allow our "good intentions" to ignore and override these organs by force feeding (at the end of life) we create the opportunity for new problems for the pet. Now the organs are forced to process food they didn't request. As a result, they just don't. You may see an increase in vomiting, constipation, or diarrhea as the body rejects the food. We are a food based society and our instinct is to nurture by way of encouraging food. Offering and encouraging are fine, but allowing a pet to decide not to eat is equally important. Letting the pet know that it is ok not to eat, will help them feel they are not letting you down. Drinking is another matter. Depending on the disease process or treatment regime, your pet may demonstrate either increased or decreased thirst. Often subcutaneous (under the skin) fluids are given to a pet to help overcome dehydration as a "comfort" measure. This can be done in the pet's own home, by a trained pet parent.

Breathing

While pet's mask pain, what they can't mask are their involuntary responses, such as their respiration and heart rate. Like a duck on the water, they look cool and calm on top, but they are paddling like crazy underneath. Normal respirations and heart rates have a rhythm and a count. Observe their breathing and feel for their pulse or use a stethoscope. Labored breathing can be a helpful sign that a pet needs pain management, or that the pain has progressed beyond pain management.

Obvious Pain

Demonstrated pain is serious. If a pet is vocalizing (yelping or crying out loud) it means the pain has become so excruciating that they can no longer mask it. Restlessness, like not sitting or laying comfortably, is another sign of obvious discomfort. Unlike our human family members pets do not communicate in our native language, but they do communicate. Most pet parents know the language of their pet and can tell when they are hurting.

Walking /Mobility

Some of the most heart wrenching signs of a pet's decline are witnessed in the struggle they begin to show with basic mobility. Getting up and laying down, something that was once done in a blink is now a chore. Sometimes pets pace for hours in circles trying to get the courage to lie down, knowing the pain they will experience between the standing position and being able to get in a position of rest. Falls become more frequent and violent. A debilitated pet usually has lost muscle mass that would have cushioned the fall. Today there are many helpful pain medicines and mobility aids that can assist. But ultimately, when a pet is unable to ambulate independently, their quality of life is seriously compromised. If the pet were not in a domestic environment and instead were in the wild, they would not survive. Their death would not be peaceful.

*We provide complete end of life support
for your pet and your pet's family*

"The Decision"

The purpose of assessing quality of life is to ultimately come to terms with the final act of kindness a pet parent can offer a beloved pet, humane euthanasia. The definition of euthanasia is, "a good death." We are fortunate that we are able to provide this gift for our pet family members. We are also fortunate that in many areas there is availability for this service to be done in the pet's own home. The pet stays in their comfortable environment, surrounded by their loved ones. The pet parent does not have to drive to and from the vet, allowing them to grieve in the privacy of their own home. The experience is more in line with the beautiful relationship that has developed between the pet and their family, achieving the ultimate goal of helping everyone go from pain to peace. The Rainbow Quality of Life Scale® is a tool that helps the family have a better sense of when it is "time".



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