



Quality of Life Scale

Introduction

When we decide to have a pet we take on a complex responsibility and covenant to protect and be there for it — in every way. The time may come when he or she grows sick or infirm, and it is our unavoidable duty to do what is best for the pet, despite the heartbreak that may bring to us, personally. In doing that, euthanasia is our last and most profound act of love and stewardship. In making that terrible moral decision we must step beyond our own feelings, and do what is best for the pet. And it now all comes down to quality of life.

The death of a beloved pet can be so tragic for us. That is such a hard concept. But if they outlived us who would care for and love them when they die? Maybe somehow, this is the best way.

Nobody wants to live forever. And when we can also somehow put that into perspective for our dear animal companions, it makes a lot of new sense. They have their own strong sense of dignity, too. Unfortunately, that is too often overlooked.

One of the most common complaints we hear is that people fear they may have waited too long — or not long enough — before having their beloved companion animals euthanized. If it is feasible, we suggest filling this scale out three times, on three successive days, to get a more accurate appraisal.

We can be too emotionally involved and subjective to easily make a clear decision. The following Quality of Life Assessment System is a means designed to help you make a more objective evaluation.

It is strongly suggested that you confer with your veterinarian, in deciding on that last accommodation.

Permission to print the following scale has been generously granted by the author, Alice Villalobos, DVM.

QUALITY OF LIFE SCALE

Pet caregivers can use this Quality of Life Scale to determine the success of Pawspace care. Score patients using a scale of: 0 to 10 (10 being ideal).

Score	Criterion
0-10	HURT - 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 daily or 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.? 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? (Some caregivers feel euthanasia is preferable to amputation, but an animal with limited mobility yet still alert, happy and responsive can have a good quality of life as long as caregivers are committed to helping their pet.)
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. The decision for euthanasia needs to be made if the pet is suffering. If death comes peacefully and painlessly at home, that is okay.
TOTAL	A total over 35 points represents acceptable life quality to continue with pet hospice (Pawspace).

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 the International Veterinary Association of Pain Management (IVAPM) 2011 Palliative Care and Hospice Guidelines. Reprinted with permission from Dr. Alice Villalobos & Wiley-Blackwell.

Alice Villalobos, DVM, DPNAP, a renowned veterinary oncologist, introduced "Pawspace", a quality of life program for terminally ill pets. Pawspace starts at diagnosis and includes symptom management, gentle standard care and transitions into hospice as the pet nears death. Dr. Villalobos developed this scoring system to help family members and veterinary teams assess a pet's life quality.

Chat Rooms

Pet Loss

Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Friday
8 p.m.-10 p.m. ET

Sunday
2 p.m.-4 p.m. ET

Thursday
8 p.m.-10 p.m. PT

Anticipatory Bereavement

1st and 3rd Thursdays
8 p.m.-10 p.m. ET

