

Questions to Ask Your Veterinarian During End-of-Life Care

A Gentle Guide for Families Facing Difficult Decisions

“Asking questions isn’t a sign of doubt. It’s a sign of love.”

*Hearts & Halos Photography
Legacy, end-of-life & memorial photography · Nova Scotia’s South Shore*

Introduction

Few conversations are more difficult than those surrounding the end of a beloved pet's life.

When emotions are high, it can be hard to know what questions to ask, what information you need, or what options may be available. Many families leave veterinary appointments wishing they had asked something they forgot in the moment.

This guide was created to help you prepare for conversations with your veterinary team. Not every question will apply to every situation, and you do not need to ask them all. Instead, use this resource to identify the questions that feel most important to you and your family.

There are rarely perfect answers in end-of-life care. The goal is not perfection — it is making informed, compassionate decisions based on your pet's individual needs and your family's circumstances.

Understanding Your Pet's Condition

Before making decisions, it can be helpful to have a clear understanding of your pet's diagnosis and prognosis.

Questions to Consider

- What exactly is happening medically?
- Is my pet's condition likely to improve, remain stable, or worsen?
- What changes should I expect in the coming days, weeks, or months?
- What signs indicate the condition is progressing?
- Are there any treatment options we haven't discussed?
- What are realistic expectations for treatment?
- How will this condition affect my pet's quality of life?

Notes



Assessing Quality of Life

Quality of life is often one of the most important factors in end-of-life decision-making.

Questions to Consider

- Is my pet comfortable?
- How do you assess quality of life in cases like this?
- What signs of pain or distress should I watch for?
- Are there specific changes that would indicate my pet is suffering?
- What good days and bad days should I expect?
- Is my pet still able to enjoy the things they love?
- Are there quality-of-life assessment tools you recommend?

Notes

Pain Management & Comfort Care

For many families, comfort becomes the primary goal.

Questions to Consider

- Is my pet currently experiencing pain?
- How can we better manage discomfort?
- Are there medications that may help?
- What side effects should I watch for?
- Are there non-medication options that could improve comfort?
- What changes can I make at home to support my pet?
- How will I know if pain is no longer adequately controlled?

Notes



Hospice & Palliative Care

Some pets may benefit from hospice or palliative care focused on comfort rather than cure.

Questions to Consider

- Is hospice or palliative care appropriate for my pet?
- What would hospice care involve?
- How often should my pet be reassessed?
- What symptoms should prompt an emergency visit?
- What can I do at home to support comfort and dignity?
- What signs suggest we may be approaching the final stage?

Notes



Preparing for Euthanasia

For many families, euthanasia becomes part of the conversation.

Questions to Consider

- How will I know when it may be time?
- What factors should I consider?
- What happens during the euthanasia process?
- Will my pet feel pain or distress?
- Can family members be present?
- Can children attend if appropriate?
- Can other pets be present?
- Do you offer home euthanasia services or referrals?
- What should I expect emotionally and physically?

Notes



Aftercare Options

Many families appreciate discussing aftercare before a crisis occurs.

Questions to Consider

- What aftercare options are available?
- What is the difference between private and communal cremation?
- If ashes are returned, what should I expect?
- Are memorial products available?
- Are there burial options in my area?
- How long does the aftercare process typically take?

Notes



Supporting Children & Family Members

If children are involved, additional planning may be helpful.

Questions to Consider

- How can I explain my pet’s condition to my child?
- Are there resources you recommend for children?
- Should children be present during euthanasia?
- How can we help children prepare for goodbye?
- Are there grief resources available for families?

Notes



Emergency Situations

Sometimes conditions change unexpectedly.

Questions to Consider

- What symptoms would require immediate veterinary attention?
- If my pet declines suddenly, what are my options?
- Who should I contact after hours?
- What should I do if I am unsure whether my pet is suffering?
- Is there a local emergency clinic you recommend?

Notes



Questions for Yourself

In addition to speaking with your veterinarian, you may find it helpful to reflect on your own feelings.

Consider Asking Yourself

- *What matters most to my pet?*
- *What activities still bring them joy?*
- *What worries me most right now?*
- *What support do I need?*
- *What would I want if I were making this decision out of love rather than fear?*

Reflection



Gentle Reminder

You do not have to make these decisions alone.

Your veterinary team is there to help guide you through medical information, treatment options, quality-of-life considerations, and end-of-life planning.

Asking questions does not mean you are uncertain. It means you are trying to make the most informed and compassionate decisions possible for a pet you love deeply.

There is courage in seeking information.

There is compassion in preparing.

And there is love in asking difficult questions.

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