



**Birchwood
Animal Hospital**
For the love of animals since 1959

Birchwood Animal Hospital
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End of Life Care and Preparing for Euthanasia

Making the Decision:

- The decision to euthanize can be one of the most difficult things people ever have to do. There can be many different reasons that we need to relieve our pet's suffering.
- Sometimes it is difficult to make an objective decision when you are so close to your pet. Our goal is to give your pet as much quality time with you as possible, but to prevent suffering. We are here to guide you through this process, every step of the way.
- We use a variety of criteria to help you make this decision. Dr. Alice Vallalobos developed the **HHHMM** scale for quality of life. These letters stand for: **Hurt**, **Hunger**, **Hygiene**, **Happiness**, **Mobility** and **More Good Days than Bad**.

Criteria:

Hurt: Adequate pain control including breathing ability is paramount. Is pain successfully managed? Is oxygen necessary?

Hunger: Is your pet eating enough? Does hand feeding help? Can we only maintain quality of life with a feeding tube?

Hydration: Is the patient drinking enough? Even with adequate water consumption some animals are dehydrated due to excess water loss. Supplementary fluid intake using subcutaneous fluids may be needed.

Hygiene: Are there bed sores, fecal or urine scalding? Brushing and cleaning after elimination as well as soft bedding may help.

Happiness: Does the pet still enjoy favourite activities? Does he or she express joy or interest to family, toys, etc? Is the pet depressed, lonely, anxious, bored or afraid? Can your pet's bed be close to family activities to prevent isolation?

Mobility: Can the pet stand without assistance? Would help from a person or a cart be useful? Is there stumbling or seizures?

More Good Days than Bad: When there are more bad days than good days, there are serious concerns about quality of life.

What Happens During the Euthanasia Appointment:

- Once you and your veterinarian have decided to go forward with the euthanasia, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This includes deciding what should be done with your pet's remains. We will discuss this in detail in an upcoming section.
- Some prefer to take care of the bill prior to this visit or before the euthanasia takes place. This means you do not need to come up to the front desk after the procedure.
- You will need to decide if you wish to stay for the appointment. This is personal and we respect your decision. Increasingly, clients are staying for the appointment as it may help with closure and allows time to grieve. Others prefer not to stay as it may be emotionally difficult.

Your pet may not fully understand the gravity of the situation, especially if they are ill and not alert. You need not feel obligated to be present. Please let us know your preference.

- Having children in the room is a personal decision. If you have any concerns please discuss this with your veterinarian.
- Most euthanasias are performed after sedation is given by injection. Sedation helps your pet feel less anxious and eases the euthanasia process. It generally works quickly in our smaller pets, but can take a bit longer in our larger dogs. Some pets do go through an excitement or disorientation phase after they are given the sedative, but this generally does not last long.
- Once your pet is sedated we will have one of our nurses come into the room to assist the doctor. We clip a small amount of hair over the injection site and inject the euthanasia solution. Most animals pass away within seconds to minutes. Some clients are surprised at how quickly this takes place. The doctor will listen to the heart and confirm that your pet has passed away.
- Involuntary muscle movement is uncommon yet possible, even after the animal's heart has stopped and we know that they are gone. It is also normal for our pets to have their eyes remain open and on occasion lose urinary or bowel function. This is a natural part of passing away.
- You may stay with your pet in the room afterwards if you would like more time to say goodbye. Keep in mind that it may be difficult to drive yourself home. Please plan a ride if necessary.
- We offer keepsake pawprints at no charge, or we can provide you with a lock of hair from your pet if you wish.

What Happens With My Pet Afterwards?

- We work with a local Winnipeg company Precious Pet Cremation: www.preciouspetcremation.com. Birchwood staff have toured their facility and they have been a part of the animal community for more than 20 years.
- You have three options:
 1. **Individual Cremation:** Your pet is cremated individually and the ashes are returned to you in an urn of your choice. It takes about a week for the remains to be returned to our clinic, and we will call you upon their arrival. If it is important for you to view the cremation of your pet, this can be arranged.
 2. **Communal cremation:** Your pet is cremated but the ashes are *not* returned to you. Several family pets are cremated together and the ashes are buried on Precious Pet's twenty acre, peaceful country property.
 3. **No Cremation:** You may take your pet's remains home for personal disposition.

Grieving:

- Your pet was an important part of your life, and grieving is a natural part of this loss. If you are having a hard time with the grieving process, do not hesitate to speak with your veterinarian or our clinic staff. We understand how hard this can be.
- There are many resources to help you through this difficult time:
 - Pet Loss Support Group at the Winnipeg Humane Society
Call (204) 988-8804, if there is no answer please leave a message and someone will call, or e-mail pet-loss@shaw.ca.
 - www.pet-loss.net
 - www.aplb.org

References: veterinarypartner.com