

for making the decision for euthanasia too soon or too late, or for allowing your horse to be injured—even if you did everything you possibly could. It is common and normal to feel doubt over whether you have made the best decision, regardless whether your horse was euthanized or died from a disease or injury. Overcoming guilt takes time. Please be compassionate with yourself and remember that you made the best decisions you could at the time.

Depression also is common after a beloved animal dies. You may feel profound sadness, loss of energy and interest, isolation, and loneliness. It might be hard to get out of bed in the morning, especially if your morning routine involved caring for your horse. Sometimes you may even wonder if you can go on without your horse.

The answer is yes, you can go on, but there are times when special assistance may help you cope with your loss. **If you are suffering from profound or prolonged depression, please seek professional assistance.**

Eventually, you will come to terms with your feelings. You will begin to accept your horse's death. You will be able to remember your horse and your time with them without feeling the intense emotional pain you previously felt. This doesn't mean that you will no longer feel a sense of loss, just that you have come to terms with the fact that your horse has died, and appreciate the time you had together and the gifts your relationship brought you both.

Even when you have reached acceptance, negative feelings and depression may resurface. If this does happen, these feelings usually will be less intense, and with time they will be replaced with fond memories.

Sometimes asking yourself, “Does my horse have more bad days than good days?” can help you make the decision.

WHAT IF I JUST CAN'T SEEM TO RECOVER FROM THE LOSS?

If you or a family member have great difficulty in accepting your horse's death and continue to experience grief and sorrow, you may want to talk about these feelings with someone who is trained to understand the grieving process and can support and help you as you mourn your loss. Your veterinarian certainly understands the relationship you have lost and may be able to suggest support groups and hotlines, grief counselors, clergy, social workers, or psychologists who can help.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO REMEMBER MY HORSE?

Just as the grieving process varies from person to person, so does the method of remembering the horse that shared your life. For some people, a memorial service or gathering can be deeply comforting and therapeutic. You may choose to keep and display reminders of your horse, such as photos, tail or mane clippings, horseshoes, or anything else that helps you recall and treasure the good times you spent with your beloved companion. You also may wish to make a memorial contribution to a charity in honor of your horse and the deep bond you shared.

SHOULD I GET ANOTHER HORSE?

Some people may feel they would never want another horse, while others may recover from their loss more quickly with a new horse in the family. Just as grief is a personal experience, so is the decision of when, if ever, to bring a new horse into your life. It's a good idea to involve family members in this decision. Although you can never replace the horse you lost, you can find another to share your life.

FOR MORE COMPANION ANIMAL RESOURCES, VISIT:

American Veterinary Medical Association
avma.org/PetOwners

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Consider not only what is best for your horse, but also what is best for you and your family.

It's never an easy decision to make. But perhaps the kindest thing you can do for a horse that is extremely ill, severely injured, declining in quality of life, or dangerous, is to have your veterinarian provide a humane, compassionate end to their life through euthanasia.

Although euthanasia is a personal decision, you have help in making that choice. Your veterinarian can walk you through any questions or concerns, and offer support as you grieve the loss of your beloved companion.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Many owners eventually are faced with making end-of-life decisions for their horses. Understanding the euthanasia process can bring some comfort and peace. Consider not only what is best for your horse, but also what is best for you and your family. For example, if your horse has an injury or disease that cannot be treated or requires more care than you and your family can provide, and rehoming is not possible, euthanasia may be the best option.

HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN?

Asking yourself these questions can aid your decision-making process:

- Is my horse suffering?
- Does my horse have more bad days than good days?
- Does my horse still enjoy the things they normally do and seem interested in their surroundings, or do they seem consistently depressed or unresponsive?
- What are the chances my horse will recover?
- How long will my horse be debilitated or in pain, and how well can their comfort be managed during that time?
- Will my horse require special care that I can't provide or afford?
- Is my horse a danger to themselves, their handlers, or other animals?

Your veterinarian understands your bond with your horse and can evaluate the animal's condition, estimate the chance for recovery, and discuss any potential disabilities, special needs, or other long-term issues. Your veterinarian also can explain medical and surgical options and their costs, as well as risks and possible outcomes, so that you can make an informed decision.

If there is any part of the diagnosis, possible effects on your horse's future, or costs of treatment that you don't understand, ask questions that will help you understand. The veterinary team is here to help you. Although there are times when the decision needs to be made immediately, you usually will have some time to review and discuss the situation with your family and friends before deciding.

WHAT IF THE HORSE IS PHYSICALLY HEALTHY?

If your horse has become dangerous or too difficult to maintain despite earnest efforts to modify or manage their behavior, euthanasia may be necessary. Your safety and that of your family and others, both people and animals, always needs to be taken into consideration.

Economic, emotional, time, and space limitations also may cause an owner to consider euthanasia if no viable solutions exist and a suitable, alternative home cannot be found for the horse. Discussing possible alternatives with your veterinarian, friends, fellow horse lovers, and family can help you feel more comfortable with your options as you make your decision.

HOW DO I TELL MY FAMILY?

Even if you haven't openly discussed the issue of euthanasia with your family, they may already be aware of the problems your horse is having. It's a good idea to share with them the information you have received from your veterinarian. Long-term medical care sometimes can be a burden that you and your loved ones may be unable to bear emotionally or financially, and this situation deserves to be discussed openly and honestly. Encourage family members to express their thoughts and feelings. Even if you have reached a decision, it's important that family members—especially children—feel heard.

WHAT ELSE IS IMPORTANT TO THINK ABOUT?

Once the decision for euthanasia has been made, you will need to decide where the procedure will be performed and what to do afterwards with your horse's remains. Local regulations and other factors may have an impact on what can be done with the

remains. Your veterinarian can help you navigate any laws and provide information about burial, cremation, and other alternatives.

Some owners find that early engagement in end-of-life planning—before euthanasia becomes a serious consideration for their horse—brings some degree of comfort. It can provide some guardrails for decision-making when the time comes to say goodbye. In addition to arrangements for the remains, such planning can include talking with your veterinarian about which signs of declining quality of life will signal to you that euthanasia may be the best option.

If your horse is insured, be sure to familiarize yourself with the details of coverage, including the insurance company's policy on notification prior to euthanasia. Following the insurer's requirements will increase the chance of a claim being approved.

WILL THE EUTHANASIA PROCEDURE BE PAINLESS?

The goal of euthanasia is to provide a quick, humane death. This means treating the horse with the utmost respect and minimizing pain, distress, and other negative effects. Your veterinarian will use their experience and what they know about you, your horse, and the situation to decide the best way to achieve this goal.

During the procedure, there can be risk of injury to anyone standing near the horse, so it is important to follow your veterinarian's instructions. In some cases, it will be safer to keep your distance from your horse until the animal is lying on the ground, unconscious.

Death occurs after the horse has become unconscious. The horse may move their legs or head or breathe deeply several times, but these are just reflexes that occur as the body shuts down. They don't mean that your horse is in pain or is suffering. Your veterinarian will confirm that the horse has passed away and let you know when the euthanasia process is finished.

HOW CAN I SAY GOODBYE?

The act of saying goodbye is an important step in managing the natural, healthy feelings of grief and sorrow following the loss of a beloved friend and companion. Once the euthanasia decision has been made, you and other family members may wish to say goodbye to your horse. Some horse owners choose to be present when their horse is euthanized, while others choose to say goodbye beforehand and not be present during the

procedure. This is a very personal decision, so do whatever feels right for you and your family.

HOW CAN I FACE THE LOSS?

After your horse has died, it is natural and normal to feel grief and sorrow. The relationship you shared with your horse is a special and unique bond that needs to be mourned. The grieving process includes acknowledging and accepting the reality of your loss, accepting that the loss and accompanying feelings are painful, and adjusting to your new life without your horse. By understanding the grieving process, you will be better prepared to manage your grief and to help others in the family who share your loss.

Sometimes well-meaning family and friends may not realize how important your horse was to you or the intensity of your grief. Comments they make may seem uncaring or even cruel, despite their best intentions. Be honest with yourself and others about how you feel.

Your memories allow your horse to live on in you, so embrace them. Talk about your sorrow, but also about the fun times you spent with your horse, the activities you enjoyed, and the memories that are meaningful to you.

Also seek support from others, especially if you feel despair or severely depressed. This may mean talking with family or friends, other horse owners who have experienced a loss like yours, or a mental health professional—whatever works for you.

WHEN WILL THE GRIEF GO AWAY?

The loss of a horse can be a stressful, heartbreaking life event. Everyone experiences grief differently, at a different pace. There is no right or wrong way to feel.

You may go through periods of feeling different emotions like denial, sadness, anger, anxiety, numbness, and guilt. These feelings may be delayed, or they may be intensified by other losses. Sometimes, they may seem overwhelming. Take time to work through your grief rather than trying to push away or ignore your feelings.

Some feelings may relate to how your horse died. For example, you may feel guilty or blame others for not recognizing an illness earlier, for not doing something sooner, for not being able to afford additional treatment,