

WHEN WILL THE GRIEF GO AWAY?

The loss of a pet can be a very 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, and they may be brought on more intensely by the loss of other family members. Sometimes, your feelings may seem overwhelming. It's important to take time to work through your grief rather than trying to push away or ignore your feelings.

Some feelings may relate to how your pet died. For example, you may feel guilty or blame others for not recognizing the illness earlier, for not doing something sooner, for not being able to afford additional treatment, for making the decision for euthanasia too soon or too late, or for allowing your pet 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 for your pet, regardless whether the pet 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. Day-to-day tasks can seem overwhelming, and 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 pet. Sometimes, you may even wonder if you can go on without your pet.

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

Even when you have reached resolution and acceptance, however, 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.

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

If you or a family member are having great difficulty in accepting your pet'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 PET?

Just as the grieving process varies from person to person, so does the method of remembering the pet that shared your life. For some people, a funeral or memorial gathering can be a deeply comforting and therapeutic way to honor a pet and share memories with others who knew them. You may choose to keep and display reminders of your pet, such as photos, paw prints, fur clippings, or anything else that helps you recall and treasure the good times you spent with your dear friend. You also may wish to make a memorial contribution to a charity in honor of your pet and the deep bond you shared.

SHOULD I GET ANOTHER PET?

The death of a beloved pet can be deeply upsetting. Some people may feel they would never want another pet. They may feel that the thought of having—and eventually losing—another pet is unbearable. These feelings often pass with time. For others, a new pet may help with recovery from grief.

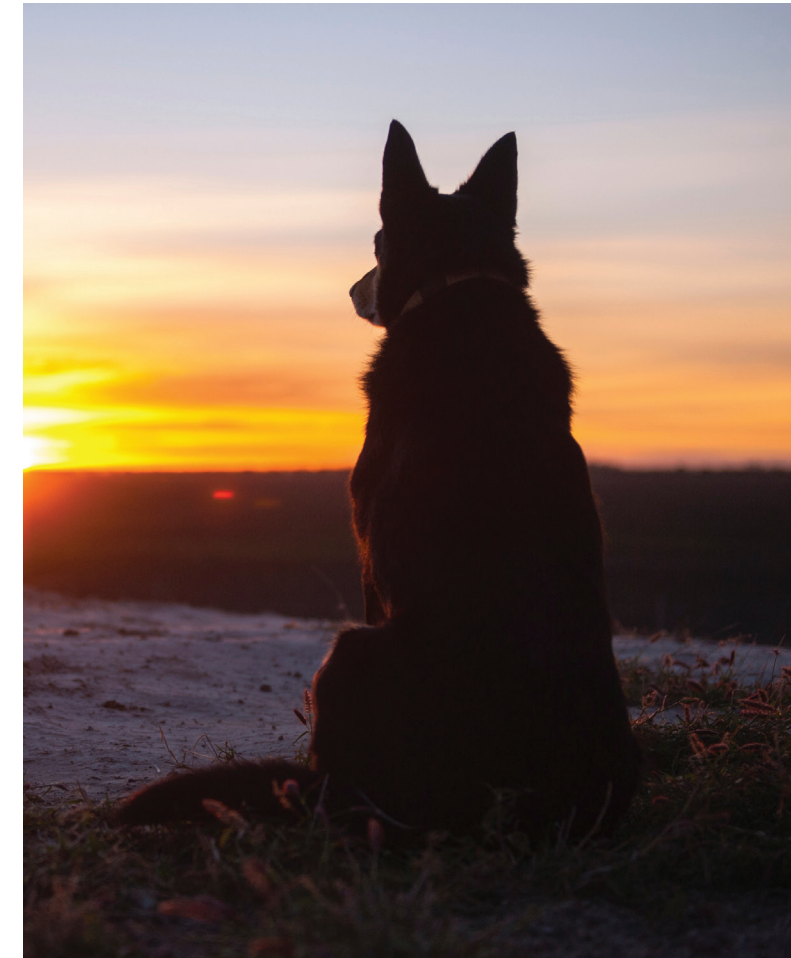
Just as grief is a personal experience, so is the decision of when, if ever, to bring a new pet into your life. It's a good idea to involve family members in this decision, and to consider the potential impact on any surviving pets. Although you can never replace the pet you lost, you can find another to share your life and love.

FOR MORE PET OWNER RESOURCES, VISIT:

American Veterinary Medical Association
avma.org/PetOwners

PET EUTHANASIA

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

It’s never an easy decision to make. But perhaps the kindest, most loving thing you can do for a pet 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 you might have 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 pets. Understanding the euthanasia process can bring some comfort and peace. Consider not only what’s best for your pet, but also what’s best for you and your family. For example, if your pet has an untreatable disease or injury, or requires more care than you and your family can provide, then euthanasia may be the best option.

HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN?

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

- Is my pet suffering?
- Does my pet have more bad days than good days?
- Does my pet still enjoy the things they normally do and seem interested in their surroundings, or do they seem consistently depressed and unresponsive?
- What are the chances my pet will recover from their condition?
- Will my pet require special care that I can’t provide or afford?

Your veterinarian understands your bond with your pet and can evaluate the animal’s condition, estimate their chances for recovery, and discuss any potential disabilities, special needs, and 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 pet’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 MY PET IS HEALTHY?

Sometimes euthanasia is necessary if a pet has become vicious, dangerous, or unmanageable, and efforts to modify or manage their behavior aren’t working. Your safety and that of your family and others, both people and animals, need to be taken into consideration.

Economic, emotional, time, and space limitations or changes in lifestyle also may cause an owner to consider euthanasia if no viable solutions exist. In these cases, consider pursuing all available opportunities to rehome the pet or place them with a rehoming agency, before making that final decision. Discussing possible alternatives to euthanasia with your veterinarian, friends, fellow pet lovers, and family can help.

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 pet 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?

When the decision for euthanasia has been made, you will need to decide what to do afterward with your pet’s remains. It may seem strange to make these arrangements before euthanasia, but doing so can bring some degree of comfort in knowing what will happen next. It also can free you from having to decide after the euthanasia, when you are grieving. Your veterinarian can provide information about burial, cremation, and other alternatives.

Some owners also find that it helps to talk with their veterinarian in advance about which signs of declining quality of life will signal to them that euthanasia may be the best option. This can provide some guardrails for decision-making when the time comes to say goodbye.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT DURING THE EUTHANASIA PROCEDURE?

Euthanasia is most often accomplished for pets by injection of a death-inducing drug. Depending on your pet’s needs and medical history, your veterinarian may first administer a sedative to help your pet relax and make them comfortable. As the sedative takes effect, you may notice your pet becoming drowsy.

Once the euthanasia drug is administered, your pet will immediately become deeply and irreversibly unconscious as the drug stops brain function. Death is quick and painless. Your pet may move their legs or head or breathe deeply several times after the drug is given, but these are just reflexes that occur as the body shuts down. They don’t mean that your pet is in pain or suffering. Your veterinarian will confirm that the pet 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 pet. A last evening with your pet at home or a visit to them at the hospital may be suitable, depending on the situation and your needs.

Family members who want to be alone with the pet should be allowed to do so if possible. Some owners choose to be present when their pet is euthanized, while others choose to say goodbye beforehand and not be present during the procedure. After euthanasia, some people find it helpful to spend some time with their pet. These decisions are very personal, so do whatever feels right for you and your family.

HOW CAN I FACE THE LOSS?

After your pet has died, it is normal to feel grief and sorrow. The relationship you shared with your pet 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 pet. By understanding the grieving process, you will be better prepared to manage your grief and to help others in your family who share your loss.

Even well-meaning family and friends may not realize how important your pet 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 pet to live on in you, so embrace them. Talk about your sorrow, but also about the fun times you and your pet spent together, the activities you enjoyed, and the memories that are meaningful to you.

If you feel despair, talk to someone who is receptive and nonjudgmental when listening to your feelings about the loss of your pet. Seeking out social support can help you work through your grief. If immediate family and friends are unable to provide this support, find an emotionally safe and accepting environment such as a pet loss support group.

