

## What Is Quality of Life For Pets?

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[Dr. Phil Zeltzman](#) discusses what, exactly, constitutes quality of life for pets.

Pets don't need a fancy red sports car, a generous retirement account or a fulfilling job.

Their basic needs include being able to eat, drink, breathe, walk, urinate, defecate, groom and sleep, all in a pain free manner. And hopefully, you can expect a little tail wag here and there from a dog and a happy meow from a cat.

This list is certainly debatable, I admit it. One could add that a pet should be free of loneliness, fear and boredom. But I think the short list is a good starting point when you consider medical conditions.

If any of these basic bodily functions doesn't take place, or if it occurs with discomfort or pain, then your pet has a decreased quality of life. What can you do then? You need to start by having a serious conversation with your family veterinarian.

Questions that need to be answered are: Why is my pet painful? How can we decrease the pain? Can medications or surgery help?

For example, if your dog limps, pain medications, surgery, joint supplements, weight-loss or a "joint food" might help. If your cat has a tumor, surgery may help get rid of it. If your pet has a hormone imbalance, medications may solve the problem. The list goes on...

How can you tell if your pet's quality of life is changing? One subjective but simple way is to use a scale from 1 to 10, 1 being the poorest quality of life and 10 being the best. If you rate your pet as a 9 in January and a 3 in June, then it is time to face reality. You need to have a heart-to-heart discussion with your family and your veterinarian about what can realistically be done.

For a more thorough & slightly fancier quality of life scale, you can visit <http://www.pawspice.com/qualityoflifescala.html>. If you question your pet's quality of life, you can print a few copies of the "HHHHHMM" Quality of Life scale. Then fill in a form regularly, monthly, weekly or even daily depending on the situation. This will help you see a trend more objectively: is your pet's status the same, better, or worse than last time you assessed the situation?

Remember this very important concept: "age is not a disease." Just because a pet is 12 or 14 or 16 years old does not mean you should give up easily. That said, if neither pain management nor medical and surgical treatments can help, then maybe it is time to consider euthanasia.

As emotionally and ethically difficult as it is for a pet owner, the whole family, and the veterinarian and his/her staff, euthanasia is sometimes the only reasonable, humane solution. It may be the only way your pet finds relief. For a pet, quality of life includes the right to end suffering with dignity when all reasonable options have been exhausted.

*If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian - they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.*

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