



PET EMERGENCY PLANNER • RESOURCE 2 OF 5

Signs It May Be Time to Consider Hospice or Euthanasia

A compassionate guide for families navigating one of the hardest decisions in pet ownership

*"Choosing euthanasia is not giving up.
It is one of the most profound acts of love you will ever give."*

A Gentle Guide for the Hardest Decision

There is no "right time" that arrives with a clear signal. Most families describe it as a gradual shift — more hard days than good days, more worry than peace. This guide is not here to make the decision for you. It is here to help you recognize what you are already seeing, and to trust yourself in the seeing of it.

Physical Signs to Watch For

These signs, especially when they appear together or persist despite treatment, often indicate that your pet's body is struggling more than it can recover from:

Urgent Concern Signs

- Labored breathing or gasping
- Uncontrolled pain despite medication
- Complete refusal to eat or drink
- Seizures that are increasing in frequency
- Unable to rise, stand, or move
- Internal bleeding or uncontrolled symptoms

Progressive Decline Signs

- Rapid, unexplained weight loss
- Persistent vomiting or diarrhea
- Incontinence that causes distress or infection
- Difficulty swallowing or drinking
- Increasingly frequent bad days
- Loss of interest in favorite activities

Respiratory & Cardiovascular

- Persistent coughing or wheezing
- Blue or pale gums (seek emergency care)
- Fluid accumulation in chest or abdomen
- Rapid heart rate that won't settle
- Fainting or collapsing episodes

Neurological & Cognitive

- Confusion, disorientation, getting "lost"
- Staring into space for long periods
- Circling, head pressing, or stumbling
- Loss of house training suddenly
- No longer recognizing family members

Behavioral & Emotional Signs

Behavioral changes are often the earliest and most telling indicators that something has shifted for your pet:

- ☐ Hiding in unusual places or withdrawing from family interaction they previously enjoyed
- ☐ No longer responding to their name, touch, or the things they used to love most
- ☐ Vocalizing in pain — crying, whimpering, or growling when touched or moved
- ☐ Restlessness or inability to settle — pacing or constantly shifting positions
- ☐ No longer seeking or accepting affection from familiar people
- ☐ Blank, glassy, or distant expression that wasn't there before
- ☐ Showing fear or anxiety that was previously not part of their personality

Quality of Life Considerations

The "Good Day / Bad Day" Question

Ask yourself honestly: When you count the days this week, were there more moments of comfort and joy, or more moments of struggle and suffering?

- More good than bad = quality of life is still meaningful
- About equal = it may be time to plan and have conversations
- More bad than good = your pet may be ready for peace

Is Your Pet Still "Them"?

Many families describe the hardest moment as when their pet "stopped being themselves." Ask:

- Do they still have moments of joy or connection?
- Do they still recognize and respond to you?
- Is the essence of who they are still present?
- Would they choose this if they could tell you?

"If your pet could speak to you, they would not ask you to keep them from leaving. They would ask you to keep them from suffering. The courage to let go is one of the truest forms of unconditional love."

— Shared with families by Dr. Dixon

When to Have "The Conversation" with Your Vet

Many families wait too long to talk with their veterinarian, worried they'll be pushed toward a decision they aren't ready for. A good veterinarian — and Dr. Dixon's practice is built on this — will never pressure you. The conversation is simply information.

- ☐ **When you notice any of the signs above** — a conversation now gives you time to plan calmly rather than in crisis
- ☐ **When you find yourself Googling "when to euthanize my pet"** — that search itself is a signal worth honoring
- ☐ **When you're dreading tomorrow more than you're hoping for it** — your emotional exhaustion matters too
- ☐ **When your pet's condition is changing rapidly** — so you have a plan before you're in emergency mode
- ☐ **When your gut tells you something has shifted** — you know your pet. Trust yourself.
- ☐ **After a difficult emergency visit** — when prognosis is poor or quality of life cannot be restored

A note on guilt: The guilt you feel is not evidence that you are doing something wrong. It is evidence that you love your pet deeply. The decision to choose euthanasia when suffering cannot be relieved is not abandonment — it is the final, most generous gift you can give: a peaceful, pain-free goodbye, surrounded by the people they love most.

Hospice Care vs. Euthanasia

These are not opposing choices — they exist on a continuum of compassionate care:

Hospice / Palliative Care

Focuses on comfort and quality of life when a cure is no longer possible. May include pain management, nutritional support, gentle therapy, and family coaching. Appropriate when your pet still has meaningful good days ahead.

Euthanasia

A gentle, compassionate choice to end suffering when quality of life has declined beyond recovery. At-home euthanasia allows your pet to pass peacefully in their own familiar space, on their own terms.

We're here to walk this with you.

Call Dr. Dixon to talk through what you're seeing — no pressure, just compassionate guidance.

(704) 274-2999

shayshayvet.com/schedule-appointment