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## **Saying Goodbye**

The fact that you are reading this means you are facing some tough times with your pet. Let me start by saying that our hearts go out to you. We have all lost pets of our own and however we felt or coped, it is always a devastating time.

I firmly believe that part of the responsibility of looking after a pet is making sure that they don't suffer and sadly part of that responsibility may involve considering euthanasia (known as putting an animal to sleep) when there is nothing more we can do to help them. This handout aims to run through the things you need to know about the process of euthanasia so you don't have to ask.

### ***Making the decision***

I haven't a lot to say that will make this easier but in my experience owners usually just know when the time has come. It is usually a case of weighing up your pet's quality of life and remembering that animals don't care about the future all they want is to be happy in the right now. You are always welcome to call us or come in if you want to talk it through.

### ***What happens when an animal is put to sleep?***

It is very much up to you how you want things to proceed and we try to be as flexible as possible. Some people like to stay with their pets and that is absolutely fine. Others prefer to remember their pet as they were and not stay with them for the procedure. In some cases we will place an intravenous catheter when you arrive for your appointment. For this we take the animals away for a few minutes to place the catheter before returning your pet to you to wait together. This allows us to give the injection with the needle going into a bung and not actually touching your pet. If your pet is catheterised you can hold him or her with minimal interference needed from the vet and nurse.

The first thing we need you to do, should you bring your pet in to be put to sleep, is to sign a consent form which gives us permission to go ahead with the euthanasia. The injection we use is actually an anaesthetic agent so from the animal's perspective the experience is very similar to when they are anaesthetised for an operation. We will clip a patch on your pet's front leg, this is to allow us to feel the vein. This bit doesn't hurt but some animals are a bit worried by the noise from the clippers. We then inject into the vein on the front leg. The needle is a scratch (unless we have already placed a catheter at which point they feel nothing) and then the injection sometimes feels a bit cold going up their arm. After that they don't know much about it, the injection works quickly

and if they were asked to count down from ten it's unlikely they would finish counting. Once the animal is unconscious they don't know anything about what is going on and their body slows down and they pass away. Most often they do just go to sleep and that is what it looks like. Occasionally after the animal has gone they take some reflex breaths which looks a bit like gasping. It can be disturbing if this happens but just remember they know nothing about it and it is just a reflex. A peculiar thing to animals that some people find upsetting is that they don't tend to shut their eyes once they have gone, their eyes fall open not shut. Rest assured this is normal for animals and doesn't mean they aren't peaceful.

For animals with very poor circulation or who are scared or intolerant of being handled we will sometimes give injections differently or sedate them prior to the euthanasia. We can discuss your pet's particular needs and make a plan (and back up plan) together.

### ***What will happen to my pet afterwards?***

That is entirely up to you. Some people choose to bury their pets at home and others prefer to cremate their pet. Should you choose cremation you can elect to have the ashes buried at the crematorium or have them returned to you in a box, casket or urn of your choosing. We can organise the cremation for you and work with a well established company in whom we have every confidence that your pet will be treated with care and respect. If you opt for an individual cremation the ashes are returned to us within a couple of weeks and we will let you know when they are ready to collect. If you choose cremation we will keep your pet's body in cold storage at the practice until the crematorium collects them.

### ***What about extra support?***

Losing a pet is a dark time and sometimes it helps to talk to someone who understands. You are more than welcome to contact us if you need help, support or just a friendly ear but there are other sources of help too:

<http://www.theralphsite.com/index.php?idPage=6>

<https://www.bluecross.org.uk/pet-loss>

Blue Cross pet bereavement support service: 0800 096 6606

### ***What now?***

Every situation is different so let us help you and your pet as best we can.

### ***Contact us***

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