

At this sad time

As they grow older, many pets receive treatment for stiff joints and circulatory problems, just like people. As their condition deteriorates, medicines fail to improve their quality of life and you are then left with a quandary - is the quality so poor that it is unfair to prolong this life, or is life precious at all costs? With pets, who are part of the family, we have the option to end a life which has become a burden for that poor pet.

As Veterinary Surgeons, it is in our ethos that if a pet has a very poor quality of life, through lack of mobility or other illness, with no chance of improvement, then the last kindness would be to spare the pet from further discomfort or illness. It is not necessarily a "pain" decision. It is a "quality" decision. This means standing back and assessing your pet. Are they enjoying life? Is their appetite good? Does their tail wag to welcome you? Are they still happy to go for little walks? Does the cat still demand food and wrap themselves, purring around your leg? Do they seek attention like they used to? Is the pet's toilet always in the correct place? If all you have is an existence and not a life, then we would recommend euthanasia as a gentle, humane option, when the time is right. The old dog that potters out to the garden for a few minutes at a time, yet is a happy dog, who is pleased to see everybody with a welcome and eats well, has a good quality. There is nothing wrong with just being old! Like the old cat who sleeps a lot, yet is always looking for a warm lap and soon lets you know if the food is low. Unfortunately, it is only you who can relate to us how your pet is coping at home and only then can we advise. When you come to the surgery, they are invariably much more alert than they were at home, which makes a decision even more difficult.

In the end it can only be your decision. We can only advise and give our thoughts. "What would we do if she was mine?" we often think. We try to do this as honestly as possible.

Euthanasia is carried out using a strong anaesthetic injection, given into a vein on the foreleg. Sometimes a sedative may be used first. This causes rapid loss of consciousness. Most pets are left with us and all are cremated. You have the option to bury your pet as well as have cremation with ashes returned to you. This is quite expensive, with the cost of individual cremation with ashes back for a *small* dog costing around £100, depending on if you chose an urn or casket etc and this cost must be paid in advance of cremation. We can discuss full options at any time. We mention this here because, at the time, it is difficult to think clearly, but if you have decided in advance, then it is comforting not having to discuss these details, when everyone is upset.

The loss of a pet is very upsetting; sometimes as upsetting as losing a member of the family. Some people are distraught and find help from bereavement

counselling. The Society for Companion Animal Studies has a befriender referral service at the end of the phone. It sometimes helps to share your feelings with someone who understands and can help. Our staff are also trained so please do not hesitate to ask for a chat with a trained staff member. Isabel, on Dundee reception has had advanced training on this matter.

(SCAS offers this phone service via a counsellor near you. To be put in touch, phone 0800 096 6606. Their web site is www.scas.org.uk SCAS also offers a very good booklet entitled 'Death of a Family Friend', available from SCAS, TheBlueCross, Shilton Road, Burford, Oxon OX18 4PF)



The picture above is of Cracker, whose story was in a very early Parkside Post when he was a young dog. It was some time ago because he recently died when he was over 15 years old. Good value for money from Brown Street Kennels! He can't be replaced, but we will find a new companion for Rosie and she will become the older, wiser one and the circle repeats itself. Not the end of the book – just the start of a new chapter. After all, when you take on a pet and have years of fun and laughs, you know they will break your heart - one day.

SAVINGS PLAN

Our Savings Plan allows you to put money towards your pet's account, so that it is in credit, to allow for an unexpected bill, or plan for an op, or routine vaccinations. It does not earn interest but there is no charge for this and the money is yours, so you can take it out again out if you are in credit. Some people prefer this to Pet Insurance as this always has an excess to pay every time you have an illness and once you pay a premium, you never see it again. Remember that bills must still be paid in full, even if there are insufficient funds in your pet's account. Most people open a direct debit (forms at each surgery) or you can phone and add money to your account via Switch or a credit card.