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Assessing Your Pet's Quality of Life

When our beloved pets are sick with something like severe arthritis, heart disease, or cancer, it can be hard to tell whether or not he/she is still enjoying life. Do they miss playing with toys? Are they happy & content lying on the couch in the sunshine? What is going through their minds when they don't feel like eating breakfast or seem hesitant to go for a walk? Are they giving up? Is it time? These are all difficult questions we face because we simply can't ask our furry family member what's bothering them.

This scale was developed to get a more objective sense of our pet's quality of life. Are they having more bad days than good days? Take a moment to reflect on these seven categories that highlight our pets' basic needs. Consider re-taking this assessment every few days or weeks to gain insight into the life our pets are experiencing.

Hurt – rate how well your pet's pain is controlled. If your pet is on pain medication, does it help your pet rest more comfortably, walk more easily, or show more interest in his surroundings?

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|-------------------------------------|---|---|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|--------------------------------|---|----|
| Not controlled, in a lot of pain | | | Somewhat controlled, some pain | | | | Under good control, no pain | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Hunger – rate how well your pet is eating. Do you have to encourage your pet to eat whereas you used to never have to? Will your pet only eat if you entice them, warm the food, or hand-feed them? Does your pet have a feeding tube in place or, have you discussed a feeding tube with your veterinarian?

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|---|---|----------------------------------------------|---|---|---|-------------|---|----|
| Not eating | | | Eating less than usual or with difficulty | | | | Eating well | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Hydration – rate how well your pet is drinking & staying hydrated. Is your pet constantly drinking from the water dish – more than usual? Does your pet urinate more often or larger volumes than he/she used to? Have you talked with your veterinarian about dehydration & has your vet already needed to recommend subcutaneous fluids (fluids under the skin)?

| | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------|----------|--------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Not drinking, very dehydrated | | | Drinking less than usual, somewhat dehydrated | | | | Drinking normally, well hydrated | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Hygiene – rate how clean & well-groomed your pet is. Are you able to keep your pet clean & neat on a daily basis? Does your pet have uncomfortable or painful mats in the fur? Does your pet have mats that may trap poop or dirt close to their skin, cover their eyes, or cover their feet? Does your pet have pressure sores (bed sores)? Do you frequently find your pet lying in urine?

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|---------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Messy, has bed sores, wounds, significant mats | | | Somewhat messy or dirty, some mats | | | | Brushed, neat, and clean | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Happiness – rate how active & happy your pet is. Does your pet express joy & interest in their surroundings? Are they happy when you come home? Are they responsive to your family &/or toys? Are they isolated, depressed, anxious, or bored?

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|----------------------------------|----------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Anxious, lonely, or depressed | | | Bored, less active than before | | | | Happy, playful, active | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Mobility – rate how well your pet can get up & move around. Does your pet need help getting up? Does your pet greet you at the door when you come home? Is your pet stumbling, slipping, or having seizures? Does your pet still want to go for their regular walks?

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------------|----------|----------|------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|------------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Can't get up and/or move without help | | | Can move, but doesn't like or want to | | | | Gets up and moves around easily | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

More good days than bad – rate how many good days versus bad days your pet has had in the last week or month.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|----------|-------------------------|----------|------------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------------------|----------|------------------|-----------|
| Almost all bad days | | More bad days than good | | Good days and bad days about equal | | Mostly good days, but occasional bad days | | Mostly good days | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Now add the scores from each section to get the total score. A score of 35 or less indicates that your pet’s quality of life is reduced & it would not be wrong to consider humane euthanasia at this time. A score of more than 35 indicates your pet likely has some degree of compromise, may be suffering slightly, but may not have a significantly decreased quality of life. In fact, this score may mean there are some other things we can do together to help increase their quality of life. Since each pet has their own unique ability to deal with stress & discomfort, humane euthanasia is still a real option. However, each pet’s personality should still be taken into consideration in light of their given circumstances. The doctors & staff of Levittown Animal Hospital are always available to discuss any questions you may have regarding such a difficult topic. Please feel free to reach out to any of us should you have any concerns.

Date: _____

Total Score: _____

*Adapted by Michael Funk, DVM from Villalobos,AE. Quality of Life Scale Helps Make Final Call. Veterinary Practice News. 9/2004.

