At any point, you may decide that caring for your pet is no longer an option. Humane euthanasia can often be a very kind decision for an animal, and is certainly a more responsible and compassionate decision for an animal if you are no longer able to meet its care needs. It is important that, no matter what you decide, your animal’s welfare always comes first.

You may also choose to surrender your animal to the Ottawa Humane Society. You may contact us at any time to discuss this choice and what it would mean for you and your animal.

For more information and advice on palliative care and other options, please contact the Ottawa Humane Society.

Programs and services provided by the Ottawa Humane Society are made possible thanks to your financial support.

Please support the animals in our community.

END OF LIFE CARE FOR YOUR PET

Being a pet owner can involve difficult decisions, and perhaps none more so than when you are dealing with a pet that is dying.

THINGS YOU SHOULD CONSIDER

• Make sure you discuss your situation with your veterinarian and that he or she knows what direction you want to go in (i.e., that you want to keep your pet comfortable at home as long as he is comfortable) — but only you know what your limitations are.
• During the initial stages of your pet’s illness, if your veterinarian does not raise the topic of humane euthanasia, it doesn’t mean the topic is off limits. Some veterinarians may not broach the subject first, so make sure you initiate the conversation.
• Deciding to provide palliative care to a pet is something the whole family must agree on. The choice can be a costly one — both emotionally and financially — so everyone must be on board.
• Palliative care is an unpredictable process. You will have to be prepared to make quick decisions if your pet is in pain or if his condition changes suddenly. Remember that your only obligation is to make the best choices for your pet, and that may not always involve continuing with palliative care until the very end.
• Once you have decided to follow the palliative care route, you are responsible for recognizing suffering and acting to alleviate distress.
• Realize the role of guilt. Don’t avoid or delay humane euthanasia because you feel guilty. Remember that it can be the right decision for your pet in the end.
• Finally, realize that doing nothing is not an option. If you choose to administer palliative care to your animal, remember it doesn’t mean allowing a pet to die at home without proper care and attention. To do so would be neglect and you could be criminally charged for not providing adequate care or for willfully causing unnecessary pain and suffering to an animal.

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Make sure you discuss your situation with your veterinarian and that he or she knows what direction you want to go in.
However, as your pet's illness progresses, the care it requires may become much more complicated, time consuming and costly. You may or will have to:

- Consult with a veterinarian to ensure that your pet's medical needs continue to be met and its health constantly monitored.

WHAT IS PALLIATIVE CARE?
In human health, the medical care or treatment of someone who is dying is called palliative care. We administer palliative care to relieve that person's pain or to slow down the progress of their illness. Palliative care is about comfort — it is not about cure.

When an animal is dying, palliative care is much the same — you're not just letting a dying pet live out its remaining days; rather, you're making sure that your pet's suffering is alleviated and that it is comfortable all the while.

If you are thinking about palliative care for your dying pet, there are many practical issues that you should think about, and many questions that you should ask yourself before you decide to go this route.

Your veterinarian will play a large role in the process. If you don't have a vet, it's your duty to get one so you can make informed decisions about the health of your animal.

IS PALLIATIVE CARE THE RIGHT CHOICE?
Most importantly, you need to ask yourself who you are doing this for. As heartbreaking as losing a pet may be, you must always make sure that you are placing your pet's welfare ahead of your own emotions.

WHAT KIND OF CARE IS REQUIRED FOR A DYING ANIMAL?
In the earlier stages of a terminal illness, or when you are dealing with an animal of a very advanced age, care requirements may be relatively straightforward. You may be taking your pet to the veterinarian more frequently to have its condition assessed, or you may be administering more pain medication. Your veterinarian can ensure that the treatment your pet is receiving at home continues to be appropriate.

However, as your pet's illness progresses, the care it requires may become much more complicated, time consuming and costly. You may or will have to:

- Consult with a veterinarian to ensure that your pet's medical needs continue to be met and its health constantly monitored.

- Continue to provide the ongoing nursing your pet needs, usually by yourself (or with family support).
- Recognize signs of pain or illness in your animal, realizing that animals can be quite good at hiding symptoms — learn to look for changes in behaviour, diet, digestion, posture, temperature and weight.
- Diligently supervise interaction with other animals and/or children in the home.
- Provide a special sleeping area that may have to be elevated, or involve extra padding or cushions to regulate body temperature.
- Have someone be home constantly to monitor your pet's condition and ensure constant supervision.