



Saying goodbye to your beloved cat is a difficult and emotional experience. Concerns about your cat's comfort and quality of life can weigh against feelings of sorrow, guilt, and the impending loss of a dear friend. It's only natural that the euthanasia process is a distressing ordeal.

The doctors and staff of The Cat Doctor want to lessen your burden during this sad time. By helping you understand and prepare for the euthanasia process we hope to ease your concerns and make your cat's journey a little bit easier. This handout will discuss the euthanasia process; present criteria that will help you make your decision, and suggest ways to help your cat have a dignified and peaceful passing. Along the way, should you have questions or doubts, we will always be there for you.

### **What is Euthanasia?**

Literally, euthanasia means "good death." Through euthanasia we can relieve your cat of pain and suffering. By administering an intravenous drug, essentially an overdose of an anesthetic, we stop the heart permanently and cause quick and painless death.

### **Accept Your Grief**

Grief is a normal reaction to losing a beloved cat. Our cats have a special way of nuzzling their way into our hearts and their loss can be every bit as painful as losing a family member or personal friend. Do not be surprised if you are physically and emotionally impacted for weeks or months after your cat is gone. If your burden seems heavy, we urge you to seek the support and counseling of family and friends, pet-loss support organizations, and health professionals. In the Links section of our website, [www.catdoctorseattle.com/links](http://www.catdoctorseattle.com/links), you will find web sites for pet-loss groups and hotlines that will assist you in this time of need.

### **When is it "Time"?**

There is no right or wrong answer to choosing the proper time for euthanasia. Euthanasia involves a very personal decision influenced by the compassion you feel for your cat and impacted by circumstances in your own life. Factors that weigh on your decision might include concerns about pain and suffering and quality of life, financial and time constraints, and other stresses or pressures in your life that that interfere with caring for your cat.

Your primary concern may be your cat's quality of life. Most of us agree that quality living means a daily routine without serious pain and suffering. You may sense that your cat is not living the life he or she is meant to live.

Evaluating quality of life and whether your cat is feeling serious pain and suffering can be difficult and arbitrary. Two basic observations, appetite and responsiveness, are important indicators of how your cat is feeling near the end of his or her life. If your cat's appetite is greatly reduced or absent, there may be suffering. Responsiveness can be assessed in many ways. Is your cat interacting with you in the usual way, such as responding to your petting and talking? Is kitty following daily routines, grooming, and showing some signs of activity? Is your cat sleeping in the usual places or mostly hiding? If appetite and responsiveness are lacking and your cat's bad days outnumber the good days, then quality of life may be poor.

Financial limitations and lacking time to properly care for your cat may also influence your decision. Treatment of medical conditions sometimes requires long-term commitment to complex and expensive therapies. Likewise, there are times in your life when the timing of your cat's illness is difficult. There may be other stresses and pressures, such as your job or personal relationships that require your full attention. All of this can be overwhelming and you can't be faulted if you lack the capacity to provide and properly care for your cat.

### **Saving Goodbye**

The final decision for euthanasia must be yours. Remember, there is no right or wrong answer to this difficult question. Always be willing to seek the help of others. After you have made your decision, you may gain personal resolve by planning the last days and hours you spend with your friend, by choosing the circumstances of the euthanasia, and by selecting your beloved cat's final care.

Consider including your children in the decision making process and the moment of euthanasia but only if they are willing. Studies have shown that sheltering children by excluding them or by making up stories can be damaging in the long run.

Before saying your last goodbye, you may choose to spend some special time with your cat. A moment of quiet contemplation with your dear friend may help with closure. It may be an activity your cat enjoyed in the past like basking in the sun, sitting on your lap, or lying in the grass and smelling the outdoors. Consider including family and friends in the celebration of these final moments together.

### **Planning for the Day**

Preparing in advance can make the final day more tolerable. Before the time of euthanasia, consider the following decisions:

- Do you want to be present at The Cat Doctor at the time of euthanasia or would you want us to perform the euthanasia after you leave the hospital? In some cases we can perform the euthanasia in your home if you prefer a home euthanasia. Ask a receptionist for more information.
- How would you like to care for your cat's remains? Your options include: taking the remains home; private cremation with return of ashes in an urn; communal cremation; and regular care of remains.
- Would you like to memorialize your cat with a clipping of hair or a clay paw print?
- You may want to bring a friend or family member with you who could drive you home.

### **The Euthanasia Process**

If you do not want to be present at the time of euthanasia, you may leave your cat at The Cat Doctor and we will perform humane euthanasia as soon as possible. If you choose to be present, we will make every attempt to select a quiet time to meet with you and your cat in an examination room. In either case, prior to performing euthanasia we will ask you to sign a legal consent form, which gives us permission to administer humane euthanasia. The form will also ask for your decisions listed in the *Planning for the Day* section above. You may request the form beforehand so you may fill it out and bring it with you. Consider paying for the services beforehand, as doing so afterwards can be difficult emotionally.

Our doctors will perform the euthanasia in a dignified and pain-free manner. In some cases we will choose pre-euthanasia sedation or place an IV catheter. The final drug is a large dose of intravenous anesthesia. After injecting the euthanasia solution into a vein, the heart and lungs will stop, and death occurs within seconds. In those final seconds, your cat may take a breath and move slightly before passing. Occasionally the bladder will empty. The eyes usually remain open.

Afterwards, you are invited to remain in the examination room as long as you like to say your final goodbye.