

# Pet Care Advice

## Saying Goodbye

Thinking about losing a beloved pet is never easy.

This advice sheet will tell you what you need to know about euthanasia – putting your pet to sleep. It explains the choices you have and what to expect.

At Avonvale we are all pet owners ourselves and we understand how hard this time is. We want to support you through the process so that you feel comfortable with the decisions you've made.

Don't feel self-conscious about asking questions, no matter how small, our staff won't mind at all.

### Euthanasia – A big decision

Discussing euthanasia can be a difficult and emotional time. Where possible, it helps to consider the event beforehand so you can decide what you would like for your pet.

It is normal to feel guilty when considering euthanasia and to worry whether you are making the right decision at the right time. We all hope that our pets will die in their sleep because nobody wants to make a decision to end a life. Sadly, natural deaths are rarely as peaceful or pain free as we picture them and in the majority of cases there comes a time when we need to give our pets the 'ultimate kindness' of a dignified and pain-free end.

Our vets take time to talk through all elements of your pet's quality of life with you so that you can be reassured that the decision you have made, whatever the reason for euthanasia, has been the most appropriate one.

### Making the arrangements

Our vets usually euthanase pets at the surgery and if you let our receptionist know the reason for your appointment we will suggest times when the centre will be relatively quiet. This allows you time to say your farewells to your pet.

Some people prefer their pets to be euthanased at home. You can request this by phoning your surgery as early in the morning as possible. A visit time later that day will be confirmed.

### What happens?

Many owners are worried about the process yet don't like to ask. Knowing what to expect will make the process easier to deal with. At the time of the euthanasia we will ask you first to sign a consent form. We will then ask you if you wish to stay with your pet or wait elsewhere. There is no right way or wrong way and your decision will be respected.

The procedure is performed by your vet with a nurse in attendance and is calm and quick. The simplest explanation is that your pet will be given an overdose of anaesthetic. A small patch of fur on the foreleg is shaved by the vet. The nurse will hold your pet's leg while your vet gently administers the injection into the vein. You will be able to stroke and comfort your pet while this is done. In some cases a sedative may be given first however this is not always best for your pet and can delay the effects of the injection. Your vet will discuss this with you.

There is no pain for your pet apart from the slight discomfort of a pin-prick. The drug reaches the brain in seconds and unconsciousness often occurs before the injection has finished. The vet will stay with your pet and confirm that they have passed away by listening to their heart through a stethoscope. Sometimes some reflex muscle movements, involuntary gasps or emptying of bladder or bowels can occur. These last only a few moments and your pet will not be aware of them. In most cases none of these things happen and your pet will drift away peacefully.

### Afterwards

We will ask you if you would like some time alone with your pet afterwards, or if you wish to leave straight away that is fine too. Grief affects people in very different ways. You may feel shocked, numb, angry, guilty, anxious or relieved. These are all normal emotions and we do our best to be sensitive to this. We will offer you the option of leaving the surgery without going back through the waiting room if we can.

### Laying your pet to rest

You may choose to bury your pet in your garden or local pet cemetery. Alternatively many people opt for a cremation. Avonvale works with a trusted company, Cambridge Pet Crematorium (CPC). In a standard cremation pets are cremated communally with other pets and whilst their ashes are not returned, a small sample of each set of communal ashes are taken and added to an urn which is then interred at the cemetery.

You may choose to have an individual cremation where your pet's ashes are kept separate and returned to you to keep, bury or scatter in a favourite place. We can arrange this with CPC at a separate cost. CPC offer engraved caskets and a range of memorial options which Avonvale staff will be happy to discuss with you. CPC is very open about their service and will be happy to discuss how your pet will be treated with you personally.

The nurse will take note of your request at the time and if your pet's ashes are to be returned we will contact you when they arrive at the surgery.

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## Memorial keepsake

It is not unusual for owners to request a lock of fur or a paw print as a keepsake in memory of their pet. Just let the nurse know at the time if you would like this.

## Sudden loss

Of course, it is not always possible to prepare for the death of a pet. Accidents or acute illness happen when we least expect them and our vets and staff are very aware of the shock and distress they cause. Relieving the suffering of animals is our prime concern but where possible, we will allow you to gather other family members and give you time alone with your pet. Sometimes if nothing more can be done, it is kinder to allow a pet to pass away on the operating table and we will always do our best to give you a chance to say goodbye.

We will need to ask your wishes regarding the burial or cremation of your pet but accept that it is difficult to make an informed choice at such a distressing time. We will be as sensitive as we can to the emotional situation you are in. If you have other questions or change your mind when you get home then please contact your surgery as soon as possible.

## Paying for the procedure

Presenting the bill for euthanasia services can be awkward as it is such an emotional time. Our standard euthanasia fees for this skilled and crucial process are set regarding the species and size of your pet. If you choose to have your pet euthanased at home a separate visit fee will be charged.

If you choose to have a cremation this will incur an additional fee depending on the service chosen. Where possible, discuss your preferred options with us beforehand and we will give you an estimate of costs.

Some people prefer to pay before the procedure or to settle their account on the day so that they don't receive an unhappy reminder later. This is perfectly acceptable and is your choice.

We do ask that any outstanding balance is settled prior to or at the collection of any ashes.

## Grief

No matter how well prepared we think we are it is always a shock and we mourn the death of our pets just as we do a human friend or member of our family.

The depth of emotion felt is often unexpected and is difficult to fully express to others who have not shared the companionship of a pet. Each of us experiences grief in a unique way. Often it is hard to accept that our companion has gone and the house feels very empty. This sense of loss may last longer than you expect but it is helpful to realise that your reaction is a normal response and these emotions can be considered a tribute to what your pet has meant to you.

Avonvale staff have all experienced losing their own pets, so do not be afraid of sharing your feelings with us or with other friends who have shared a similar experience.

## The Future

After a while you may feel ready to introduce a new animal to the household. Only you will be able to decide when the right time is for you, there is no right and wrong period. A new pet will not replace the one that has been lost and investing love in a new animal will not betray the old, but will bring a new personality and loving companion to your home.

Our team at Avonvale will be happy to help you consider new pets and give advice on introducing a new animal to your family especially if you have other pets already.

We hope this leaflet has answered your questions regarding euthanasia and the death of a pet. It has been written with reference to material from The Animal Welfare Foundation and more information is available on their website [www.bva-awf.org.uk](http://www.bva-awf.org.uk)

Please don't hesitate to talk to Avonvale staff about any aspects or concerns you may have. Bereavement advice and support is also available through the:

**Blue Cross Pet Bereavement Support Line**  
0800 096 6606 (8.30am -8.30pm)  
[pbssmail@bluecross.org.uk](mailto:pbssmail@bluecross.org.uk)