

Euthanasia and grief

My cat is old!

Aging is not a disease; cats live longer and healthier than before because of the science progress. Your cat is starting to have greyish hair, being less agile, hears and sees less, sleeps longer. Aging signs start around 7 to 11 years old in a healthy indoor cat. For an outdoor cat the signs appear earlier.

How can I help my old cat?

Visits at the veterinarian: twice instead of once

A complete exam is recommended every 6 months because an adult cat can age 4 years (in "human" years) in a year. The veterinarian will do a complete exam and can suggest blood tests if needed to step in and reduce the progression of some disease like renal insufficiency, diabetes, etc. Dietary needs change with age will play a very important role in the prevention of some diseases (renal, hepatic, digestive, joint and dental)

Different situations can bring us to decide on euthanasia for our cat:

A debilitating disease in terminal phase, age with loss of autonomy, a sudden death or a fatal accident or a behaviour problem threatening the family's security.

Is my animal suffering?

Suffering is bearing or enduring a state that can be painful or not and has direct impact on his life quality. Recall that animals don't complain the same way humans do.

Quality of life for a cat consists in having a good appetite, interacting with us, coming to us to say hello. The veterinarian will be able to help you determining your cat's health and tell you exactly if your cat is bearing or enduring a state that will not get better with medication and to what point it is affecting his life quality. The decision is made with your trustworthy veterinarian. It is better to die than having a debilitating disease associated with a poor quality of life.

The five steps of grief

1 - Choc, denial : this short phase of grief happens when we have to let our life companion go. The person refuses to believe it. It is a more or less intense period where emotions *seem* almost absent. When you leave this short step of grief that the reality of the loss installs itself.

2 - Anger: phase characterised by a feeling of anger toward the lost. Guilt can install itself in some cases. Period of questioning.

3 - Bargaining: phase of negotiation, blackmailing...

4 - Depression: phase more or less long of the grief process characterised by great sadness, questioning, distress. The bereaved in this phase sometimes feels like their grief will never end because they have live a big range of emotions and sadness is great.

5 - Acceptation: Last step of grief where the bereaved gets better. The reality of the loss is more understood and accepted. The bereaved can still feel sadness, but he recovered his full function. He also reorganised his life according to the lost.

The 5 phases above can be linear but it also happens that a bereaved has flashbacks before he restarts going forward. A good way to go through grief is to understand what we are living and share our feelings and emotions with relatives or people that are also living a grief.

These steps are not necessarily in this order. It is not an inevitable *mechanism*. Some people may leave grief and move on to the final stage of freedom of action, but that they could carry feelings can be considered *negligible*. [Elisabeth Kübler-Ross](#)' works

Making grief easier

You first have to discuss it with all family members including children and explain the reasons that are leading to euthanizing your cat and that you are doing it for his good so he doesn't suffer anymore. Speak openly with your children about your cat's death and let him express himself without judging. Remember the stages of grief.

Please note that no other animal can replace the cat you have live with for many years. Wait a couple of weeks or months before taking another animal home.

Time is the best remedy

The old saying that the pain fades with time is also true after the loss of a pet, even if, at that time, we refuse to admit it. Accept the loss of your beloved companion and give yourself time to experience your grief.