

## Quality of Life Assessment

### Why has a quality of life assessment been recommended?

Typically, quality of life (QoL) assessments are recommended when your pet has been diagnosed with a lifelong or life-limiting illness, or is approaching their senior years. But no matter a pet's health status or life stage, monitoring their quality of life can help you and your veterinary team make the best decisions about treatment and care possible.

### What is Quality of Life (QoL)?

Although each pet and owner's definition of a good quality of life is unique, it can generally be accepted that QoL is to what degree a pet is healthy, comfortable, and able to participate in or enjoy life events. Their relationship with you is also a big part of a pet's QoL, as well as yours.

### How can we measure quality of life?

It is impossible to devise an assessment method that will work perfectly for every pet and owner, because your pet's medical conditions, relationship with you, and the things they enjoy are unique to them. You know your pet better than anyone.

But to help you make a more objective assessment that you can share with your veterinary team and monitor over time, the following system can be very helpful.

Take some time to consider each aspect of your pet's life in the last week or two. Give them a score from 0 to 10, where 10 is ideal.

Aspect	Guidance	My Pet's Score
<i>Mobility</i>	10: Good, no difficulty getting around, enjoys walks and going outside 5: Poor, difficulty getting up, difficulty positioning to toilet, short walks 0: None, needs assistance, can't position to toilet, drugs don't help	
<i>Nutrition</i>	10: Good, consistent robust appetite, eats willingly, seeks food 5: Poor, requires hand-feeding or enticing to eat 0: None, anorexic or requires feeding tube, or vomiting what they eat	
<i>Hydration</i>	10: Good, drinking normal volumes at normal times 5: Poor, not drinking much, or drinking excessively/always thirsty 0: None, not drinking, relies on a drip or subcutaneous fluids, vomiting	
<i>Comfort</i>	10: Good, pain well-managed, breathing with normal effort 5: Poor, pain not well-controlled, or difficulty breathing 0: None, drugs not helping pain, works hard to breathe/requires oxygen	

<i>Hygiene</i>	10: Good, able to keep self clean 5: Poor, needs frequent bathing or matt removal, sometimes soils self 0: None, soils self often, skin scalded by urine, matts restrict motion	
<i>Interaction</i>	10: Good, interacts with family and other pets, on own initiative 5: Poor, reduced interaction or enthusiasm, needs persuasion 0: None, withdraws/hides away, negative or no response to family	
<i>Toileting</i>	10: Good, regular normal urination and defaecation 5: Poor, constipation, diarrhoea, excessive or difficult urination 0: Very poor, severe diarrhoea, needs assisted bowel/bladder care	
<i>Favourite Things</i>	10: Good, keen for favourite things eg play, toys, walks, cuddles 5: Poor, reduced interest in or ability to enjoy favourite things 0: None, no interest in or ability to enjoy favourite things	
<i>Total Score</i>		

### **What does my pet's total score mean?**

The maximum score is 80, which represents an ideal quality of life. Even healthy animals often don't live a perfect quality of life every day, so don't worry if their score isn't perfect. But if it is, great!

Scores 60-80 represent a good quality of life, take time to enjoy it! Work closely with your veterinary team to adjust treatments and monitor changes to keep quality of life this good.

Scores 40-60 represent an acceptable quality of life, but there are problems that need to be addressed. Talk to your veterinary team to explore treatments and strategies to improve these.

Scores below 40 represent a low quality of life. If treatments are failing to improve life for you and your pet, humane euthanasia should be considered as the kindest option. Contact your veterinary team as soon as possible to discuss quality of life.

These scores are very broad generalisations designed to assist you, so if your pet has an acceptable score but you still feel their quality of life could be better, or you have concerns you want to talk about, this is absolutely valid. Only you can ultimately decide how your pet is doing, and it is always best to talk to a member of your veterinary healthcare team before using a score to make any decisions.

### **What should I do with my pet's QoL score?**

Your pet's score can help you decide if changes to treatment are needed, help you tell if a treatment is working, and help you communicate your pet's quality of life to your veterinary team. And although it can never tell you exactly when it's time to say goodbye, it can make this decision easier.

It is useful to keep track of your pet's score over time, as this can help you detect deterioration in your pet's condition, and may assist with giving a prognosis or deciding when the time is right for euthanasia.

The score can never replace an open and honest discussion with your veterinary healthcare team. We are here to listen to your concerns, discuss options, and assist you in making decisions.