

Assessing Your Pet's Quality of Life:

Creating A Daily Journal Of Good And Bad Days

When your pet is approaching the end of life, and you are questioning if it's time to say goodbye, starting a daily journal of good and bad days can be a helpful tool to guide you in how your pet is doing over time. This journal can help you monitor trends in your pet's well-being and be a reliable source of information as you strive to advocate on your pet's behalf.

The goal of creating a daily journal of good and bad days is to document how your pet is doing over time. This can help you remember the ups and downs of their health history and help give a more accurate assessment of how your pet is actually doing daily. As pet owners and lovers, we know how it's human nature to want to focus on the positive aspects of our pet's health while minimizing the attention we give to the negative aspects.

To exemplify how a "Daily Journal of Good And Bad Days" can help, we will look at two examples:

1) Comet, the dog, used to be very active, but now, at 13 years old, he's been struggling to walk for the past two years. Comet has reached a point where standing and walking are very difficult, and his pain medications no longer seem to help him. He is weak, slipping on the floors and can only go on short walks to eliminate before he wants to return inside. He no longer wants to play with his toys, seems uncomfortable and is not sleeping well. Despite these significant mobility challenges, Comet briefly perks up and wags his tail a time or two at meal times and when his owners get home before regressing back to his uncomfortable, sedentary state.

2) Sparkles, the cat, is now 18 years old, and she's been struggling with chronic kidney disease for several years. She used to love eating, basking in sunny windows and lying on her owner's desk as they worked from home. Sparkles loved the attention and playing with her catnip toys. Now, she is barely eating despite her owner offering a wide variety of foods, as her veterinarian suggested. The treatments for the kidney disease are no longer helping, and she is losing weight. She's very thin, weak and often sitting in a hunched position with her eyes held partially closed off in the distance. She is not actively seeking attention and has not played with her catnip toys in over six months. Despite these significant changes in her health, Sparkles will still purr for a moment or two when her chin is scratched, and she enjoys taking a few licks of tuna juice before regressing back to her uncomfortable, sedentary state.

The two examples above are common examples of the dilemma encountered by pet owners in the difficult end-of-life period. The examples mentioned above are the kind of dilemmas many pet owners go through during the tough final phase of their pet's life. Sadly for our beloved pets, most of the day becomes a struggle as their illness progresses, and the benefits they once received from medications and supportive care diminish. As caring and informed pet owners, we continue to love and support our pets but understand their quality of life is declining. Perhaps the time to say goodbye has arrived? Our hearts are so torn at the thought of having to make this difficult decision.

In our deepest despair, we offer Comet some treats, and as he wags his tail a little and gobbles them up, our hearts fill with joy. Giving Sparkles a scratch on the chin makes her start to purr, and it's truly magical to hear this sound again. As devoted pet owners, we yearn to push aside all the negatives we've noticed and wish for these moments of happiness to linger indefinitely. We crave tail wags and kitty purrs to define each day. Yet, as swiftly as these joyous moments come, Comet and Sparkles revert to their chronic discomfort and sedentary state. Advocating earnestly for our pets demands that we remember Comet's wags and Sparkles make up only a fraction of their entire day. We must utilize all available resources to evaluate our pet's quality of life, recognizing that Comet and Sparkles have had another "bad" day.



Now that we have our daily journal, the next step is to use the available quality of life assessment resources to evaluate if our pets have had a "good" or "bad" day. For example, consideration of our pet's favourite things, the LSPH QOL scale, the OSU article and other resources can help you do this. The goal is to monitor the good and bad days over time in our daily journal. In general, if you observe that there are three or more consecutive bad days or notice that the bad days outnumber the good days over time, you should discuss this with your veterinarian as soon as possible. Can you do anything else to help improve your pet's quality of life? If not, might it be time to consider saying goodbye?

Starting a journal of good and bad days can be a helpful tool in end-of-life decision-making for your beloved pet. Using the available resources to assess the quality of life and objectively looking at each full day can help you make the most informed assessment of your pet's behalf. The journal can also help reduce bias, a natural part of this process. Together with friends, family and your veterinarian, you can use this daily journal of good and bad days to assess your pet's quality of life and make difficult end-of-life decisions.

Calendar of Good and Bad Days

- Start a daily journal of good and bad days when you begin having concerns about your pet's quality of life. This journal can help to highlight how your pet is feeling over time.
- Use an "✔" for a good day, an "✘" for a bad day. You may also use a "?" if you are uncertain.
- The daily journal can be as detailed or as simple as you wish, but try to note important positive or negative details.
- If there are three or more bad days in a row, consistently more bad days than good or if you are concerned, contact your veterinarian to discuss this with them. Is there anything else you can do to improve your pet's quality of life, or may the time to say goodbye be approaching?
- This journal is to be used as a guideline only. If at any point you are concerned about your pet's well-being, please reach out to your regular veterinarian to discuss your concerns. If your concerns are urgent and your regular veterinarian is unavailable, take your pet to your local animal emergency clinic.

PET: _____ WEEK BEGINNING: _____

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT