

How can we help?



The thought of losing a beloved companion who has made your sunny days all the brighter and has been by your side when skies are grey, is nothing short of heart-wrenching.

Thankfully, the National Helpline is here. We speak to many pet owners every year who feel overwhelmed and are facing immeasurably difficult choices, but rest assured you are not alone. We are on hand to lend a warm and sympathetic ear.

Recognising the signs



Your cat may be young at heart but with the average life expectancy of a cat being around 14 years the chances are you will start to see a change in your cat's health long before age catches up with you. Consequently, we recommend keeping an eye on your cat's food and water intake, bodily and coat condition, behaviour and – on the less glamorous side of pet ownership – toileting habits! If you notice any of the following then we recommend taking your cat to the vets for a check-up:

- unusual lethargy or withdrawal
- unexplained weight loss
- lameness, reduced or altered mobility
- any swelling, growth or wound
- recurrent sneezing, coughing or laboured breathing
- difficulty or pain when urinating
- blood in either the urine or faeces
- incontinence or more frequent urination
- unusual discharge or bleeding from the eyes, nose or mouth

- vomiting or diarrhoea that lasts for more than 24 hours
- self-neglect or poor coat condition
- reduced interest in food or drink, increased drinking or a sudden ravenous appetite
- signs of pain when touched
- general discomfort or an inability to settle
- no desire to move
- reduced tolerance of people or other pets, or reduced interest in play or other favoured activities – these signs can be indicative of pain or an underlying health issue

Once a thorough health check has been conducted your vet will discuss options which will usually include treatment or further monitoring and/or tests.

He had a good life – and death

There may come a time when your vet diagnoses an incurable illness, but don't panic – there may be treatments available that will alleviate any suffering and allow your cat to continue with a good quality of life for many months or years to come.

Sadly, this will not always be the case and you should consider the possibility that the kindest thing to do for your cat is to say goodbye so that he may leave this life knowing neither pain nor suffering. This may seem like straightforward advice but we understand that the bond between you and your cat runs deep and many of us fight growing old in the high hopes of a few minutes more with those we love. However, if your cat's health is deteriorating with no prospect of recovery, the way to truly show your cat the depth of your love is to let go.

Understandably, you don't want to jump the gun but at the same time you don't want to prolong the inevitable and risk suffering so it's really important that, once you've recognised the signs and consulted with your vet, you assess your cat's quality of life moving forward.

Ask yourself whether or not your cat is living out his golden years in peace and dignity if he:

- can no longer eat or drink normally
- is unable to stand or move normally
- has difficulty breathing properly
- is badly injured in an accident
- is incontinent
- has an untreatable behavioural problem that leaves him feeling very unhappy
- has any condition that causes uncontrollable pain

The thought of ending a life may sound cruel or uncaring but it can be one of the most compassionate acts that we as humans do for our pets if they are suffering. The word 'Euthanasia' itself is literally translated from Greek as meaning "good death".

Euthanasia is a quick and painless process. It may be less stressful for your cat if he can hear a familiar voice however, if you are frightened or anxious your cat may sense this and become upset in which case you must choose whether or not it is right for you and your cat if you are present if your cat is put to sleep.

A cat will be asleep in a very short time and his breathing and heartbeat will stop a few seconds later. As a cat loses consciousness, he may take a deep breath and it is natural for his muscles to relax. The vet will then check for a pulse or eyelid reflex and may place the cat into a sleeping position.

After life



Once your cat has been euthanased you can decide where you would like him to rest. Your vet can arrange for a cremation or you can take your cat's body to the pet crematorium yourself. Your cat's ashes can then be scattered in the garden of rest, or you can opt for individual cremation after which the ashes can be returned to you and you can place them wherever will be of comfort to you.

If your cat dies unexpectedly at home and it is not allowed by your local authority or you do not wish to bury him in your garden, you can still speak with your vet who can arrange cremation.

There are also many pet cemeteries where you can take your cat. Most ceremonies have the option of a short memorial service which gives you and other loved ones the chance to say goodbye.

Even though you have said goodbye, your cat will still live on in the hearts and minds of those who loved him. Treasure your memories – remember the good times and the joy that your cat brought you as well as the happiness you brought him.

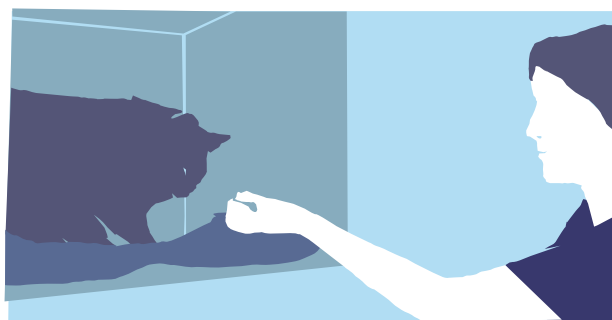
We always grieve for those we've loved and lost and a pet is no exception. If you'd like to talk



to someone who understands your feelings then many GPs and religious ministers recognise the negative effects of suppressing grief and now offer pet bereavement counselling. Pet bereavement helplines are also available for example, the Blue Cross have a Pet Bereavement Support Service. You can call

their support line on **0800 096 6606** (UK only including Northern Ireland) from 8.30am - 8.30pm every day. All calls are free and confidential from a landline.

A new hope



Many pet owners hope that in time they can offer a home to another cat in need of a second chance. The decision to get another cat is entirely personal. You may find you want another one almost immediately or you may need time to come to terms with your loss.

If your cat has had an infectious illness, your vet may advise you to wait before getting another to reduce the risk of infection remaining in your home.

Try to remember that cats, like humans, are all individuals. If you are considering getting another cat then your relationship with any new cat will be just as rewarding, but will not be the same as your previous cat and this may take some time to get used to. Your local Cats Protection will be happy to have an informal chat with you about this and will help you find a perfect partner to share in new adventures!

Finally, if you have had to say goodbye to a much-loved cat then rest assured that although they may be gone, they will have left their paw prints on your heart forever. ●

To contact Helpline, please phone **03000 12 12 12** or email **helpline@cats.org.uk**

If you see a cat, or indeed any animal, that you think is being mistreated or neglected then do call the relevant animal authority on their cruelty helplines:

England and Wales	RSPCA	0300 1234 999
Scotland	SSPCA	03000 999 999
Northern Ireland	USPCA	028 3025 1000