



Hospice & End of Life Care

How to tell if your cat has good quality of life

A major goal of hospice care is to ensure that your cat is still enjoying a good quality of life and is not uncomfortable. Comfort care for your cat might include pain medication, a special diet and changes to your pet's living environment. Such changes often result in huge differences in your pet's quality of life.

Signs that your cat still enjoys good quality of life:

Keep in mind that aging pets – and those approaching end of life – will not behave exactly as they did when they were young. Just like aging humans, expect pets to slow down and change their routines. At the same time, there are a number of ways in which cats express that they are happy and still enjoying life.

Grooming -- A cat that is grooming and licking him or herself has the mobility to do this as well as the desire to stay clean. This is a good sign that your cat is comfortable.

Mobility -- Cats can have limited mobility, but still be alert, responsive and enjoy good quality of life. Cats with mobility challenges are often given pain medication to alleviate muscle stiffness or joint pain. Changes in environment can also help cats with otherwise limited mobility more easily access litter boxes, sleeping areas and food bowls. Some cats are just slow moving and prefer to sleep more than they did before.

Eating / drinking (may need an appetite stimulant) -- Cats must be kept eating and drinking or their system will shut down. Even though aging or ill cats may not have their previous appetite, this can easily be remedied by administering oral appetite stimulants.

Responsiveness -- Interest in getting attention, purring and rubbing in reaction to touch, voices and stimulation are signs that your cat is enjoying good quality of life. Go out of your way to give additional stimulation – gentle play, rubbing, petting and scratching – so that kitty does not feel isolated or alone.

Good days exceed the bad -- If the days that your cat experiences any or all of the above signs outweigh the number of days that kitty might seem disinterested or unhappy, your cat is probably still enjoying good quality of life.

What you can do to further enhance quality of life:

- Comfort/pain control** A variety of medications ease joint, muscle and organ pain, just like for humans.
- Hydration** Is your cat drinking enough to stay hydrated? To be sure, provide kitty with extra water bowls. Fluids administered under the skin may also be recommended.
- Environment** Make sure that your cat does not feel alone or isolated. Move his or her bed close to backyard and garden windows, and family activities.
- Appetite** Is your cat eating enough to maintain his/her weight? Vary foods your cat gets; see if you can spot his/her favorites. Try hand feeding if you can without causing stress.
- Hygiene** Is your cat able to stay clean? See if your cat will let you help with washing off any urine/ stool, keeping litter cleaned from feet, wiping your cat's face and brushing.
- Happiness** Does your cat still enjoy activity around him or her? Make sure your kitty has easy access to windows, sunny spots. Help kitty move from place to place if needed; with supervision, allow your cat to enjoy the outdoors even just to sit on the porch.



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