



Rainbow Path Hospice-to-Adopt Program FAQs

How Can I Make My Home More Comfortable for My Hospice-to-Adopt Pet?

The most important thing you can do for your hospice pet is to minimize any pain or distress she's experiencing at the end of her life. Be sure to consult with the BAHS veterinarian and treat any health problems, since undiagnosed issues can cause discomfort and rapid deterioration.

Make your pet feel secure by surrounding her with her favorite things, like a warm blanket or special squeaky toy. Since pressure sores can develop in pets with limited mobility, it's also essential to provide a warm sleeping spot with plenty of cushioning. Heated pet mats and beds can provide a lot of comfort to aching joints.

Some older pets may develop incontinence, or the loss of bladder control, so be sure to check your furry friend regularly for any wetness or soiling. If your pet needs help getting up to urinate or defecate, you can purchase a sling or use a large towel to wrap under her body and assist her.

What Determines a Good Quality of Life for My Hospice-to-Adopt Pet?

- Does your pet seem irritable, restless or confused?
- Has he lost his appetite or does he drink water excessively?
- Does he avoid his favorite activities?
- Is your pet picked on by other animals in the home?
- Does he seek out unusual places to sleep or hide?

When your pet's quality of life deteriorates due to an untreatable disease or aging, please speak with the BAHS veterinarian about end-of-life decisions.

How Can I Tell if My Hospice-to-Adopt Pet Is in Pain?

When cats and dogs are suffering, they may not show outward signs that we normally associate with pain like whimpering or crying. Sometimes an animal will continue to eat or drink in spite of pain, panting, or disorientation. Some physiological and behavioral signs that your pet might be experiencing pain include:

- excessive panting or gasping for breath
- reclusiveness
- reluctance to move
- food pickiness

If you're unsure of how much your hospice pet is suffering, keep a daily record of good days and bad days. It's also important to ask the BAHS veterinarian for the exact signs of suffering likely to be associated with your pet's condition or disease.

Are There Any Behavioral Changes I Might See in My Hospice-to-Adopt Pet or Other Pets in the Household?

Irregular behavior patterns are often the first sign that your hospice pet is ill or in pain. A pet may lose his normal activity levels, appetite and grooming tendencies, or he may exhibit inappropriate elimination, vocalization, and aggression.

Other healthy pets in the household may experience similar abnormal behaviors as a reaction to the changes and distress of your sick animal companion. Be sure to get regular check-ups for all of your pets to monitor and protect against any undiagnosed issues.

What Are Some At-Home Pain Management Options for My Hospice Pet?

If you suspect your hospice pet is in pain, please make an appointment with the BAHS veterinarian for a physical examination and consultation. The veterinarian will explain the pain management protocol associated with your pet's specific condition. For pain due to arthritis, for example, a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug may be prescribed, but only after blood tests ensure that your pet does not have kidney or liver problems that would preclude using this type of medication. If your pet has more severe pain, due to a chronic illness like cancer, your veterinarian may prescribe a narcotic pain killer in the form of an oral medicine or a patch that is placed on the skin.

What Is Pet Hospice Care and What Are Its Benefits? What Are the Goals of Pet Hospice Care?

Hospice care is an option for caring families who want to provide a senior or terminal shelter pet some love and care for a time in their home, until the pet passes away or until the condition requires euthanasia. The focus is to make the hospice pet's final days or weeks more pleasant with the proper use of pain medications, dietary strategies, and human interaction. Pet hospice is not a place, but a personal choice and philosophy based on the principle that death is a part of life and can be dignified. The goal of pet hospice is not to cure your pet's illness but rather to ensure a peaceful end-of-life experience.

The BAHS veterinarian will teach pet Hospice parents how to provide intensive home care to keep an ill pet as comfortable as possible.

What Role Do I Play in My Hospice Pet's Hospice Care?

Hospice care requires an active commitment from Hospice parents, who work with our veterinary team to make sure their pet's life ends comfortably. Your pet will require your constant supervision—from assessing his condition, to pain management or, if necessary, making the final decision to opt for euthanasia.

If you decide to become a hospice care provider, you will become your Hospice pet's primary nurse and caregiver, as well as the link between your Hospice pet and the BAHS veterinary team.

What Do I Need to Know in Order to Provide Home Hospice Care for My Hospice Pet?

Hospice pet parents who opt for home hospice care will be taught how to administer pain medication, provide fluid therapy, and perform general nursing duties, including keeping their Hospice pets comfortable and clean.

One of the most important tasks as caretaker is to observe and report any changes in your Hospice pet's behavior, weight, temperature, eating habits, mobility, and overall well-being. If you notice any changes, immediately contact the BAHS veterinarian, who will adjust your pet's medication and treatment accordingly. It's also important to remember that euthanasia may still be necessary with hospice care. If a peaceful, natural end is unlikely or your pet is in pain, the BAHS veterinary may decide to end his suffering with euthanasia.

Is There a Support Group for Hospice-to-Adopt Hospice Families?

The Bay Area Humane Society has created a closed Facebook group just for Hospice-to-Adopt Hospice Families, and BAHS staff. In this group, you can ask general questions about care, provide care tips to other Hospice families, and share the ups and downs with families who have gone through the same thing. BAHS staff members also monitor the group and will provide advice as needed.

How Long will I Have My Hospice-to-Adopt Pet?

While shelter pets selected for Hospice-to-Adopt are those who are of advanced age or diagnosed with a terminal illness, we can never be sure of exactly how long they may have. It could be weeks, months, or even a few years depending on the pet, the medical concerns, and the care available.

For our records, the Hospice-to-Adopt pet will be listed as a hospice foster for up to 3 months. After 3 months, we'll process the pet's records as a hospice adoption to you. BAHS will still provide the same support, veterinary care, and end-of-life procedures.

Will My Pet Show Signs that He Is Ready to Pass Away?

To be as aware as possible of your pet's condition, you should:

- Be able to recognize signs of physical suffering typical of your Hospice pet's age and/or illness. The BAHS veterinarian is the best source of this information.
- Prevent unnecessary suffering in your terminally ill, injured, or aged Hospice pet by finding ways to assess your hospice pet's quality of life. With the BAHS veterinarian's help, figure out the signs of a good day compared to a bad day and keep a record of how often the signs of pain appear.
- Be as informed as you can about your hospice pet's behavior. Being unaware or unable to assess signs and symptoms will exhaust family members and put your pet at risk of lingering longer than is comfortable.

What Is Euthanasia?

Euthanasia provides a painless, peaceful end for a pet who would otherwise continue to suffer. The BAHS veterinary team has special training to provide your Hospice pet with a humane and gentle death. During the procedure, the veterinarian will inject your pet with a sedative followed by a special medication. The pet experiences no awareness of the end of life—the process is akin to undergoing general anesthesia for a surgical procedure.

What will Happen to My Hospice Pet's Remains After He Has Passed Away?

After your Hospice-to-Adopt pet passes away, whether from natural causes or humane euthanasia, you have the following options:

- Leave the pet's remains with BAHS. We will have the pet cremated through our partner, Forever Friends Pet Cremation Services. We will then return the ashes to you at no cost, if you so choose.
- Take care of the pet's remains as you feel comfortable. You may bury your hospice pet on your own property (in accordance to municipal statutes), or have the pet cremated at a pet cremation service of your choice, at your cost.

How Do I Know When Is the Right Time to Euthanize My Hospice Pet?

The BAHS veterinarian is really the best person to advise you on when the time is right to euthanize—information from medical tests is often more accurate than what a pet owner can observe, and pet owners often delay the moment of euthanasia in anticipation of grief.

Observing and keeping an accurate record of your pet in his daily activities can help you to decide. If you observe that moments of discomfort outweigh his capacity to enjoy life, it is time to euthanize, even if your pet still experiences pleasure in eating or socializing. If your pet is in pain, your main goal should be to minimize his suffering.

Will My Other Pets Grieve a Hospice Pet Who Has Passed Away?

After the loss of a companion animal, many people observe a change in their surviving pet's behavior. Sometimes the pet appears depressed and shows diminished interest in play or food, and it often helps to simply give your surviving pet some extra attention and love. If your animal companion appears upset, check with a veterinarian to make sure there is no underlying medical problem causing his behavior.

It is also well-documented that pets can recognize death in a companion animal. Cats, dogs, and horses who see the deceased body of an animal they knew can adjust very well and spend less time searching and grieving than pets who have not seen their companion's remains.

Where Can I Get Advice or Counseling About the Loss of My Pet?

It is as natural and necessary to grieve for the loss of an animal friend as it is for any loved one who dies. The grieving process often begins before your pet has passed away, so it's important to take care of yourself and seek help if you need it.

The ASPCA Pet Loss Support program is here to help if your pet has died or if he is ill, injured or elderly. By calling the ASPCA Pet Loss Hotline at (877) 474-3310, you will receive support in the following areas:

- Assistance with the decision to euthanize
- Comfort and support at the time of euthanasia
- Help with grieving the loss
- Advice on dealing with children, the elderly or disabled individuals who are facing a death of a companion animal
- Helping the surviving animals in the household to cope
- Assistance in establishing a relationship with a new pet