

Euthanasia

This information is provided for clients who are considering euthanasia of their beloved pet. This is a very difficult decision, regardless of the circumstances, and we hope to make it more manageable by explaining the euthanasia process.

Prior to euthanasia, you will be asked to sign forms to authorize the staff of Miami Valley Animal Hospital to perform the procedure, and to indicate your preference for disposing of the pet's remains. This is an irreversible procedure and we need to be certain this is the decision the pet owner wants. Liability concerns make it difficult for us to proceed with the euthanasia unless we have spoken with the owner, or the agent has a signed authorization form from the pet owner.

Euthanasia Procedure

The procedure itself involves the intravenous injection of a very strong anesthetic solution. This solution anesthetizes the entire brain, not just the cortex, the part of the brain that controls consciousness. There is nothing about the drug's actions that causes a painful sensation, unless it leaks into the surrounding tissue, where it can cause a local stinging reaction. Because it is given directly into the vein, most animals drift into unconsciousness quite quickly, within about 10 seconds. Shortly after, the heart stops beating, and breathing efforts cease. Many pet owners are surprised to see how quickly, quietly, and peacefully the process occurs.

Some Atypical Occurrences during the Euthanasia Process

Occasionally, the process is not typical. Ironically, older, sicker animals may have poorer circulation, or metabolic derangements that slow the distribution and absorption of the euthanasia drug. These animals may take longer to drift off, and may vocalize briefly before losing consciousness. One explanation may be they sense a "buzzing" sensation, much like we many experience when an anesthetic is administered, and they vocalize in response to confusion about the sensation. Whatever the reason, it is not likely a pain-based response; nonetheless, it can be distressing to the pet owner.

Another infrequent, but potentially distressing occurrence can happen after the pet has lost consciousness, and passed away. The pet can rather suddenly, appear to gasp for air. This can happen more than one time. The basis for this would seem to be some area of the brain, sensitive to the lack of oxygen, sending a biochemical stimulus to the muscles of the diaphragm causing them to contract, thereby bringing air into the lungs. This resembles the agonal breathing sometimes witnessed in some animals when death is imminent. When this happens following euthanasia, it is always after the animal's vital functions have ceased; the animal is not conscious, and there is no brain activity. Most animals passing is quiet and very peaceful.

The Pet Owner's Options during Euthanasia

The pet owner, family members, friends, and anyone who wants to be present during the euthanasia can do so. There are people who want to be present and there are those who do not wish to be present during the process. This is a very personal decision and one that is often difficult to make. If you would like to have support and assistance during this difficult time, please call our office at 937-434.8387 and ask to speak with Rebecca Watts MS LSW. She will get to back with you as soon as possible. We will do our very best to support you and your loved ones during this most difficult time.