

# Ask the Vet



## Sara Ryan Fletcher, DVM

Dr. Sara Fletcher is a Greensboro native & graduate of Page High School. She graduated from NCSU in 1999 and NCSU-CVM in 2003. She lives in Lindley Park with her two dogs: Rooty, a 9 year old greyhound, and Buster Brown, a 1 year old pit bull- and two young cats: Tulip and VyaLynn.

over time, making them hard to decipher. More subtle symptoms of pain are panting, hesitation, pacing, trouble getting up or down, avoidance, acts anxious or unsettled, unable to sleep for a decent length time, changes in their usual body positioning or 'posturing'. Small changes in behavior occur for a reason, and it may be pain. Ask your veterinarian if you are doing all you can to manage your pet's discomfort. It's important to remember that coping with pain is not the same as controlling pain. If you are unsure about signs of pain in your stoic pet, your veterinarian may offer a 'medication trial' to help. Ask your veterinarian if it's right

## Evaluating Your Pet's Quality of Life: How will I know it's the right time to say goodbye?

**Q** *When do we know it's time to make the difficult decision to say, "Goodbye" to a beloved, aging pet?*

**A** We don't want our furry family member to suffer and we don't want to say goodbye a moment before we have to... It's a difficult time to navigate, just as painful as it is precious and special. Such a small fraction of pets will comfortably pass on their own, and if we have to intervene it is so important that we know it's the right decision, at the right time. Lingering questions, regrets, guilt- all interfere with our ability to grieve and begin to heal from the loss. Your pet would not want you to feel like this when you think of them.

**Q** *Are Quality of Life (QOL) Evaluations critical in making the right decision?*

**A** I highly recommend using a QOL journal, such as this one online: [www.PetHospiceJournal.com](http://www.PetHospiceJournal.com). There are both subjective and objective elements to QOL, it is multifactorial and largely dependent upon what matters most to the pet. It is as individual and unique as they are and nobody knows them better than you. Identify 3-5 activities or behaviors you know your pet loves, things you know they really enjoy & make them happy. It can be anything! I'll use my dog for example (in this order): cuddling, chasing cats, chewing expensive shoes, eating, walks, grandparents. Paying attention to your pet's interest level in their favorite activities is critical to knowing how happy they are, how good their QOL is.

**Q** *What are some objective universal guidelines to consider?*

**A** Is your pet in pain? Limping or crying out are obvious signs of distress. However, many signs of pain are subtle and difficult to interpret; frequently small changes in behavior can develop

for your pet to try a pain medicine for a few days while you observe their response closely, then report back to discuss.

**Q** *What about changes in my pet's eating, drinking, urinating, and defecating routine?*

**A** Changes in appetite or water intake can be very important signs of distress. Can your pet use the bathroom on their own or do they need assistance?

**Q** *Are they willing to participate?*

**A** The Human-Animal Bond you share *IS* your pet's QOL. Are you able to connect with them? Sometimes a pet with mobility issues will seem disconnected from the family but is actually challenged by the home itself. Is their bed (comfiest & safest place) centrally located in family areas? They may be choosing comfort over interaction and they may even be lonely! Add or move beds to where you are most. Can they get around the house easily? If you have hardwoods & non-carpeted areas, your pet may be avoiding them. This reduces exercise and activity, decreases muscle strength, and exacerbates mobility issues. I recommend buying a large, rubbery (hose-able) rug-to-floor mat & cutting it in to pieces to make slip-free pathways for your pet to travel on.

**Q** *Finally, are there more good days than bad?*

**A** Keeping a record of your observations is essential to objectively evaluating QOL over time.

For more information: This one is free, easy, informative, and awesome: [www.PetHospiceJournal.com](http://www.PetHospiceJournal.com)

**See ad for Lap of Love Veterinary Hospice on page 15**