How do I start thinking about my pet's quality of life?

One of the questions we, as veterinarians, face on a daily basis is "how do I know when the time is right to let my best friend go?". Unfortunately, there is no straight forward answer, and everyone has many influences that play a part in this decision. These include but are not limited to philosophical/religious beliefs, feeling of guilt or uncertainty, financial factors, time commitments and other family member beliefs/opinions.

The most important thing to remember is that you do not have to go through this process alone. We are always here! Firstly, we can assess your pet health and give you an understanding of their condition. We can then speak to you about options to help manage any symptoms or pain you pet may be experiencing. Many times, you will find that something you thought will ultimately end in terminal illness may in fact turn out to be easily treated or managed long term.

There are never any silly questions, and you are welcome to schedule a time to talk with us about signs you can look out for to tell if your pet if living a good quality life and how it is changing over time. Some key signs to look out for include:

- Are they eating well?
- Are they comfortable or in pain? Signs of pain are very varied so please talk to your veterinarian to get a better understanding of your pet's signs of discomfort.
- Do they still enjoy their favourite activities?
- Do they hide or sleep majority of the time?
- Are they losing weight?
- Are they reluctant to move around or go for walks?

Many pet owners experience guilt for even starting to consider their pet's quality of life. However, this is definitely not the case. The act of thinking about their health and comfort is, in itself, an act of kindness. It shows that you care and that you are willing to be observant while trying to put yourself in their paws. Starting to think about their quality of life does NOT mean you have to decide to euthanise the straight away. It is just a way of assessing change over time and we will be with you every step of the way.

If you are concerned about your pet's immediate health or wellbeing please do not hesitate to take them to see your veterinarian or an emergency veterinarian if after hours.