

THE DEATH OF A TREASURED ANIMAL FRIEND IS ALWAYS SAD

QUALITY OF LIFE

Donkeys are very stoic in nature, and as old age ensues painful conditions become more common, such as arthritis, dental disease, foot problems and compromised breathing. A donkey's quality of life may gradually deteriorate and requires very careful and objective monitoring.

You may find it helpful to ask your vet's opinion and start to keep a diary of your donkey's behaviour. The Donkey Sanctuary has produced a video – *Growing Old Gracefully* – and a *Caring for the Older Donkey* fact sheet. Our Donkey Welfare Advisers can also offer advice and support on the care of your older donkey. Serious illness can affect a donkey of any age and may seriously compromise quality of life, resulting in euthanasia being the best and kindest option.



Euthanasia is an important final act in the care of your donkey. It is always a painful decision but one that must be taken when their quality of life deteriorates. Assessing quality of life is not easy, especially if you see the donkey every day, which makes it difficult to notice gradual changes in their health and wellbeing. Although each donkey will be different, the following points should be considered when assessing quality of life:

- Is the donkey able to move around freely and comfortably, particularly when turned out?
- Is the donkey being bullied by other animals in the herd?
- Is the donkey able to lie down and get up again unaided and without any difficulty?
- Is the donkey able to roll without any difficulty?
- Is the donkey able to eat and chew comfortably and maintain a healthy body condition?
- Is the donkey displaying its normal behaviour?
- Is the donkey generally healthy? Or is it suffering from any conditions that are affecting its physical or mental wellbeing?
- Has the donkey's breathing deteriorated to the point where it is persistently uncomfortable?
- Does the donkey seem 'happy'?

The death of a treasured animal friend is always sad but euthanasia should never be regarded as a failure of your care in any way – it may well be the last good thing you can do for your donkey.



PLANNING AHEAD

Plans for euthanasia are best made sooner rather than later. You may never need to put the plan into action but it is easier not to have to contend with the practicalities at a very difficult time. There are two methods of euthanasia – an overdose of an anaesthetic type drug given by injection or use of a humane killer pistol. Discuss the methods with your vet.

Think about how you would wish the donkey's body to be dealt with. Would you prefer to bury the donkey at home? There are certain restrictions on this, such as not burying near a water course, and the practicalities of creating a grave must be considered. Different regions of the UK have different regulations regarding the burial of animals, so find out well in advance what is legal in your area to avoid problems and time delays later. Cremation is another option. Your vet will be able to offer you information on local services including collection and disposal by various means.

WHERE

Consider where euthanasia should best take place. The area should be safe and have a soft surface; if the area is familiar to your donkey this will be least distressing for them. However, you do have to consider the practicalities of removing the body from small or difficult to access areas such as stables.

Also consider whether you feel able to be with your donkey at this time. If not, ask your vet if they can bring an assistant or ask a donkey-aware friend to be present. If your donkey gets distressed in the presence of strangers or vets, ask your vet if some prior in-feed sedation can be provided. Please don't hesitate to contact our Welfare Department if you would like some practical help and guidance.

OTHER DONKEYS AND COMPANIONS

Donkeys form strong bonds with their companions and it is essential that surviving donkeys are allowed to remain with the body of their friend until they have lost interest. Ignoring this advice can lead to significant distress and anxiety among any surviving donkeys. They may show persistent wandering, pacing and braying, as they look for the missing donkey. They may go into a hyperlipaemic crisis as a result of the stress (see The Donkey Sanctuary's Hyperlipaemia fact sheet). Please allow at least an hour before the body of the donkey is removed. Closely monitor the bereaved companion(s) for several weeks afterwards as bereavement stress can manifest itself up to three weeks after the death of a friend and result in hyperlipaemia. Extra attention and time spent with your donkey(s) will help, but don't be tempted to offer a lot of extra treats, which can be habit-forming and may lead to obesity. If you do decide to obtain a new donkey companion then consideration should be given to getting one of a similar age and size, whose behavioural and physical needs will match the needs of your existing donkey.



PASSPORT

After the death of a donkey you are legally required to inform the relevant Passport Issuing Organisation (PIO) and return the passport to them within 30 days. Many PIOs will return the passport to you afterwards if you request it as a memento. If you have a foster donkey from The Donkey Sanctuary the passport can be returned to the Welfare Department.

DEALING WITH YOUR LOSS

Don't underestimate the grieving process, as the death of a donkey is not an easy event to cope with. For many people it is like losing a very dear friend and feelings of deep grief are completely normal. There is no need to feel embarrassed about mourning the loss of your friend and it may be helpful to talk to friends or family who understand the size of your loss. If you feel you need more dedicated help there are specialist pet bereavement counsellors who you may find it helpful to contact.

If you are planning ahead a number of useful resources are available on the internet:

Guidance on regulations of disposal for Northern Ireland and Scotland:

http://www.netregs.org.uk/library_of_topics/waste/waste_materials/carcass_burial.aspx

Government advice on the disposal of animals and directions on classification of equines:

<https://www.gov.uk/fallen-stock>

The National Fallen Stock Company: <http://www.nfsco.co.uk/index.php>

For more support and advice please ring the welfare advice line on 01395 578222

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THE DONKEY SANCTUARY

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The Donkey Sanctuary was founded by Dr Elisabeth Svendsen MBE in 1969.

The Donkey Sanctuary (registered charity number 264818) and its sole corporate trustee, The Donkey Sanctuary Trustee Limited (Company number 07328588) both have their registered office at Slade House Farm, Sidmouth, EX10 0NU.

Incorporating: The Elisabeth Svendsen Trust for Children and Donkeys (EST); The International Donkey Protection Trust (IDPT).

WORKING WORLDWIDE