

SmartVet

1537 Fort Jesse Road

Normal IL 61761

Mon - Fri 7a-7p & Sat 8a-12n



Call or Text: 309-830-6454

Email: TheSmartVet@gmail.com

Website: TheSmartVet.com

J – O – U – R – N – E – Y – S

A Quality of Life Scale for Pets

developed by Katie Hilst, DVM

Dr. Hilst developed this Quality of Life Scale after hundreds of conversations with pet owners discussing the decision to humanely euthanize their pet. Sometimes, after the discussion, people realized that their pet was still enjoying life. Other times, people realized their pet was suffering more than they were aware, so they choose the final act of caring.

In either case, the JOURNEYS scale is meant to get you thinking and considering the factors that affect your pet's happiness and sense of well-being. There are no hard and fast rules, although in general a higher score is better. A score of 80 is a happy, healthy pet. A score of 8 is a pet that is suffering. A low score on any of the individual parts may be a reason to consider euthanasia. Please use this as a starting place to explore your pet's quality of life and address your concerns with your veterinarian.

JOURNEYS

J – Jumping or Mobility

O – Ouch or Pain

U – Uncertainty and Understanding (factors that affect you)

R – Respiration or Breathing

N – Neatness or Hygiene

E – Eating & Drinking

Y – You

S – Social Ability

For each variable there is a maximum assigned value of 10 points with an example for values of 1, 5, and 10. Use your judgment to decide how your pet scores.

Example: Eating and Drinking - if your pet "only eats treats" you could assign a value of 2 or 3.

(Where 1 is not eating at all and 5 is eating less of their regular food.)

J- Jumping or mobility:

1pt: Your pet cannot walk or stand without assistance.

5pt: Your pet can move around as long as they have their pain medication. They can do about half of the activities they did when they were younger and healthier, or they can get about half the distance on a walk, or they can spend half the time doing activities (chasing a Frisbee, swimming, hunting, etc.) as they used to.

10pt: Your pet is fully active and enjoying all of their normal activities.

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O - Ouch or pain:

1pt: Your pet seems painful (whining, crying, not willing to move) even while taking pain medication. (Note: many animals will try to hide pain or weakness as a survival trait.)

5pt: Your pet is on pain medication and it helps at least 75% of the time.

10pt: Your pet is pain free.

U - Uncertainty and understanding:

1pt: Your pet has been diagnosed with a medical condition that cannot be predicted. You may not fully understand the diagnosis, or the condition may result in a sudden and catastrophic outcome.

5pt: Your pet has a medical condition that can change over time, is currently stable, and you are able to monitor it (with the help of your veterinarian) and make adjustments when necessary. You understand what to watch for, the treatment plan, and when your pet needs medical attention.

10pt: Your pet is happy and healthy; there are no medical issues beyond routine preventative care.

R - Respiration or breathing:

1pt: Your pet has had severe episodes of difficulty breathing or open mouth breathing. They are not eating or drinking in an effort to breathe. (If this happens, you should seek immediate medical attention for your pet.)

5pt: Your pet has occasional episodes of coughing, wheezing, or exercise intolerance. The episodes are short (less than 2 minutes) and your pet is on medication from your veterinarian that can be adjusted to help.

10pt: Your pet has no coughing, wheezing, or exercise intolerance.

N - Neatness or hygiene:

1pt: Your pet lays in their urine and/or feces. They may be unable to control their elimination or be unable to move after elimination. Your pet has an external tumor or mass that is bleeding, foul smelling, and infected, and you are unable to keep it clean and/or bandaged. Your pet may have pressure sores (bed sores) from lying down and being unable to move.

5pt: Your pet may need assistance to urinate or defecate but they do not spend time lying in their own waste. They are able to hold their urine and feces until they get assistance. They may have an external tumor or mass, but it can be kept clean and/or bandaged and it is not infected. They groom themselves but may need assistance grooming some areas.

10pt: Your pet can urinate, defecate, and groom themselves without assistance. They have no medical issues that cause a bad odor. You can provide any care needed to maintain good hygiene (baths, trips to the groomer, anal gland expression, teeth cleaning, etc).

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E - Eating and drinking:

1pt: Your pet is refusing food and water. They may be vomiting or having diarrhea (or both). They may be nauseous. Cats may “hang out” at the water bowl, sleeping next to it, or sitting with their heads hanging over it.

5pt: Your pet is eating more slowly and is not as interested in food as they used to be. They may go back several times before they finish a meal. They are eating slightly less than usual, but they are still eating their regular food.

10pt: Your pet is eating and drinking normally.

Y - You:

1pt: You are constantly worried about your pet. You may not understand what is happening to them. You feel overwhelmed and stressed trying to provide for their needs. You may feel you are unable to provide for their needs physically, emotionally, or financially. There may be tension in the family and disagreement on how to proceed.

5pt: You understand your pet’s condition and are able, with some effort, to meet their needs. You have concerns, but they are manageable.

10pt: You are able to meet your pet’s needs and are not worried about any aspect of their care.

S - Social ability: _

1pt: Your pet does not spend time with the family. They may hide and become irritable or snippy if bothered. Perhaps your pet is physically unable to get to the room where they usually spend time with the family.

5pt: Your pet spends at least half the time with the family. They are not irritable or snippy. They happily greet you when you come home.

10pt: Your pet enjoys you, the family, and others (including other animals they may know), greets you at the door when you arrive home, and seeks out company.

Your Pet’s Score:

J = O = U = R = N = E = Y = S = Total =

Dr. Katie Hilst is dedicated to making pets last moments comfortable and peaceful. She is a proud graduate of the University of Wisconsin Veterinary School. She offers home euthanasia in Madison, Wisconsin and surrounding areas. She authored the JOURNEYS Quality of Life Scale for Pets in 2013 and is certified in Pet Loss and Companionship. Please visit her on the web at jouneyspet.com. Phone consultations welcome by calling 608-347-1897.
