Quality of Life Assessment
for Dogs

A compassionate guide to understanding comfort, function, and next steps in care



When a beloved dog is aging, declining, or facing a serious illness, it can be difficult to know what to do next. This Quality of Life Assessment can help you better understand your dog's comfort, daily function, and changing needs—and identify what type of support may be appropriate next.

One of the hardest parts of loving a dog is recognizing when their quality of life has changed significantly. Many families feel caught between acting too soon and waiting too long. You may be wondering:

- *Is my dog's quality of life getting worse?*
- *Can these changes be managed with additional care or support?*
- *Are we nearing the point where euthanasia should be considered?*
- *Are they comfortable?*
- *Is it time to schedule a consultation?*

How the Assessment Can Help

The assessment is not intended to lead you toward a particular decision. It offers a structured way to consider the day-to-day signs that matter most, organize your observations, and better understand what your dog may be experiencing and what type of support may make sense next.

A Fuller Family Perspective

If more than one person cares for your dog, consider having each person complete the assessment separately. Family members may notice different changes in appetite, behavior, mobility, breathing, or restlessness. Comparing your observations can provide a fuller picture of your dog's quality of life and help your family make a more informed decision together.

About This Assessment

Caring Pathways veterinary leaders developed this Quality of Life Assessment with input from end-of-life care veterinarians who participated in the research supporting its development. Caring Pathways specializes in hospice, palliative care, quality-of-life support, and in-home euthanasia.

Understanding Your Results

After completing the assessment, add your answers to determine your total score. Your score will place your dog into one of four general quality-of-life categories and provide guidance about possible next steps.

Quality of Life Category	Score	What the Result May Mean
Stable Quality of Life	75 or higher	*Most indicators suggest that your dog is experiencing good quality of life, with stable comfort and enjoyment.*
Early Care & Planning	56-74	*Quality of life is likely adequate, but support is still helpful:* Your dog appears to have more good days than bad, though some areas may need attention. This is an appropriate time to strengthen comfort care and monitor symptoms.
Consultation Recommended	21-55	*Comfort care is needed:* Your dog is facing notable challenges, and their comfort may be declining. Decisions about the next care steps are important and should not be delayed.
End-of-Life Support Recommended	0-20	*Your dog may be suffering:* Scores in this range suggest that your dog may be experiencing ongoing discomfort or distress. This can indicate that their quality of life may be significantly impacted.

Important: *This assessment does not replace veterinary evaluation or medical advice. It can help you organize your observations and have a more productive conversation with your veterinarian.*

© 2026 Caring Pathways. All rights reserved.

A. Questions about your dog's mental status and behavior.

	Does not describe my situation	Somewhat describes my situation	Definitely describes my situation
1. My dog exhibits worsening anxiety behaviors *(restlessness, clinginess, whining, pacing, panting, or inability to settle).*			
2. My dog is no longer interacting with our family the way it normally has.			
3. My dog seems more disoriented recently. *(For example: gets stuck in corners, has difficulty getting around objects, stares blankly at walls/into space, does not recognize familiar people/familiar pets.)*			
4. My dog no longer greets people at the door when entering the home, which is an unusual or new behavior for them.			
5. My dog has trouble settling down at night, falling, or staying asleep throughout the night.			
6. My dog is more or less affectionate than in the past.			
7. It is difficult for me to comfort my dog and get them back to sleep after waking at night.			
8. My dog does not consistently go outside *(or to a trained location- i.e. pee pad)* to urinate and/or defecate *(pee or poop).*			
9. My dog has growled at, bitten, or generally been more irritable with the family or other pets in the home.			

B. Questions about your dog's daily living activities.

	Does not describe my situation	Somewhat describes my situation	Definitely describes my situation
1. My dog spends the majority of the day sleeping or resting when they normally would be active.			
2. My dog has increased difficulty finding, picking up, or chewing food now.			
3. My dog has trouble finding a comfortable resting position throughout the day.			
4. At least one of my dog's activities of daily living appears to be more difficult.			
5. My dog becomes easily out of breath from one or more of their activities of daily living.			
6. My dog has been more withdrawn from the family or other pets in the home.			

C. Questions about your dog's mobility.

	Does not describe my situation	Somewhat describes my situation	Definitely describes my situation
1. My dog is no longer able to rise independently from sitting or laying down.			
2. My dog is not able to stand and position normally when urinating and defecating.			
3. My dog is less steady while walking *(i.e., crossing over of the hind limbs, stumbling, scuffing paws, frequent balance checks, etc.)* or frequently falls while walking or running.			
4. My dog's legs slide out from underneath them on smooth surfaces.			
5. My dog now requires a mobility aid *(e.g., sling, harness, traction support tools, etc.)*.			

D. Questions about your dog's general health.

	Does not describe my situation	Somewhat describes my situation	Definitely describes my situation
1. My dog has been diagnosed with cancer or organ dysfunction/failure *(kidney disease, heart disease, liver disease).*			
2. My dog is vomiting or having diarrhea consistently.			
3. My dog is having seizures that are not easily controlled.			
4. My dog is sneezing frequently or with discharge *(yellow/green discharge or blood).*			
5. My dog's walks are required to be considerably slower and/or shorter than they used to be.			
6. My dog is coughing enough to disrupt its daily routine.			
7. My dog is unable to partake in their favorite activities *(or a modified version of those activities)* any longer or is generally less playful than before.			
8. My dog has lost weight unintentionally *(i.e.- without placing them on a restricted calorie diet)* and/or seems skinnier or less muscular than in the past.			
9. My dog is showing a change in the effort required to breathe.*			

E. Questions about your relationship with your dog.

	Does not describe my situation	Somewhat describes my situation	Definitely describes my situation
1. I, or other family members, have physical limitations that make it more difficult to care for my dog.			
2. My dog's care is causing financial stress for me or other caregivers.			
3. I feel more frustrated when I am around my dog than before.			
4. I have fears and/or anxiety about my pet's condition or care.			
5. My dog's care is causing strain on relationships in the home *(either with the pet or with other family members).*			
6. I feel stressed balancing caring for my pet with other responsibilities for myself, my family or work.			
7. I feel more reluctant to discuss my dog's current situation with friends, neighbors, etc.			
8. I feel guilty that I cannot do more for my dog.			
9. My relationship with my dog has changed because of their cognitive changes, behavior changes, and /or health, comfort, or mobility needs.			

Add all of the selections in the '*Does not*' and '*Somewhat*' columns and enter the total number here		
Multiply the totals by the displayed number to calculate the column score	x 2	x 1
Column scores	+	=

Add the column scores and enter the **total score**

© 2026 Caring Pathways. All rights reserved.