

As owners and vets we have a moral obligation to ensure that our horses, ponies and donkeys have the best quality of life that we can provide for them. This is especially important to consider when our horses are growing older and is often a topic for discussion going into the winter months due to the harsher weather conditions to be faced.

We know that facing this topic can be very difficult and we are always here to support you to make informed decisions with regards the care of your horse.

Often quality of life is assessed by health but it is much more than that; we need to know that they are having a positive life experience.

Are the following basic needs of your horse being met:

1. Access to friends?
2. Access to forage ?
3. Freedom to move around?

Basic questions for measuring quality of life:

- Can your horse get up and down with ease every day?
- Is your horse maintaining an ideal weight?
- Is your horse in any pain?
- Is your horse able to move freely and comfortably?
- Is your horse as active as normal? Are they stiff or reluctant to move?
- Does your horse interact with you in the same way they used to?
- Do they interact with their equine companions in the same way?
- Are they enjoying their life?

Some of these questions are easier to answer than others. It is possible that we fail to notice gradual decline in our horses as we are so close to the situation. Asking your vet, or a knowledgeable friend can be useful.



Other factors to consider

How is the situation affecting you, as an owner? Time, energy, finances, and emotional burdens are very important to think about when caring for an elderly or chronically unwell horse. The horse-human bond tends to be particularly strong in aged horses, and grief, with associated loss, can be profound. Owners often hope that their horse will pass peacefully in the field or the stable.

Prevention of suffering is a duty for both the owner and for the vet. Sadly, when further treatments are no longer an option, and the situation has not improved, the decision to euthanise becomes the compassionate outcome.

Always feel free to call and speak with one of our vets. We are here to help and support you in making an informed decision for the care of your horse.

Below are listed a few resources to help prepare you for what happens next, including:

[Blue Cross Pet Loss Support | Pet Loss](#)

[Welfare Corner: The Five Domains of Animal Welfare | Redwings Horse Sanctuary](#)

[quality-of-life-final-v21117-1.pdf](#)

