

The 5 Finger Rule for End of Life

A guide to assessing your pet's quality of life



When you're facing end-of-life decisions for a beloved pet, it can be hard to know what "the right time" looks like. The 5 Finger Rule is a simple, compassionate way to check in on your pet's comfort and joy—one day (and one loving moment) at a time.

Use these five "fingers" as a quiet guide. You don't need perfect answers—just honest observations and kindness toward yourself and your pet.

1) Fun: Are they still enjoying what they love?

Think about the little things that used to light them up—sniffing outside, a short walk, a favorite toy, cuddling in a sunny spot.

- Do they still show interest in favorite activities, even in a smaller or slower way?
- Do they have moments of curiosity, playfulness, or comfort?
- Are "good moments" still happening each day or week?

2) Food: Are they eating and drinking with comfort?

Appetite changes can be a normal part of aging and illness, but they can also be a sign that your pet is feeling unwell or nauseated.

- Are they eating foods they typically enjoy?
- Are they able to chew and swallow comfortably?
- Are treats, favorite meals, or hand-feeding still appealing?

3) Favorite Person: Are they connecting with you?

Pets often tell us how they're doing through connection. Even small signs—eye contact, leaning in, a tail wag, choosing to be near you—can be meaningful.

- Do they respond to their favorite people or seek comfort from them?
- Do they seem soothed by touch, voice, or presence?

- Do they still recognize familiar routines and gentle attention?

4) Functions: Can they manage the basics of daily life?

This includes mobility and toileting—things that affect comfort, dignity, and safety. Changes here don't automatically mean "it's time," but they're important signals to track and discuss with your veterinarian.

- Can they walk, stand, and reposition themselves without significant struggle?
- Are they able to eat, drink, and rest comfortably?
- Can they urinate and defecate with minimal pain, stress, or accidents?

5) Phone: Use photos or videos to track changes (and hold onto memories)

It's easy to adjust to gradual changes without realizing how much has shifted. Taking a short weekly photo or video can help you notice trends over time—and it can also become a treasured record of your love together.

- Choose a simple moment each week: walking, eating, greeting you, resting comfortably.
- Look for patterns: Are the good days getting fewer? Is comfort harder to achieve?
- Keep the focus gentle—this is about clarity and compassion, not perfection.

A quiet reminder: You are not "giving up" when you consider comfort. You are loving your pet in one of the hardest, most tender ways—by listening closely to what they need.