

ASSESSING QUALITY OF LIFE

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 we face. 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. Below we have put together some considerations for assessing your horse's quality of life:

When assessing your horse's quality of life there are some key factors to be considered.

Are the following basic needs of your horse being met?

1) Access to friends 2) Access to forage 3) Freedom to move around

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. We can also ask more specific questions about their day-to-day life.

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 in a tight circle, and walk, trot, and canter?
- Does your horse interact with you in the same way they used to?
- Do they interact with their equine companions in the same way?
- Do they have a normal pulse (28-40bpm) and breathing rate (8-20bpm)?
- Are they having a life worth living?



Some of the questions may be easier to answer than others. It is possible that we fail to notice gradual decline when we are so close to the situation. Asking your vet, or a knowledgeable friend, for their opinions can be useful.

Depending on your answers, it may be appropriate at this juncture to start some treatment.

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. This is seldom true. 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. Below are listed a few resources to help prepare you for what happens next, including:

Calling and speaking with one of our vets. We are here to help and support you in making an informed decision for the care of your horse.

[quality-of-life-final-v21117-1.pdf \(bhs.org.uk\)](#)

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

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

T: 01666 826456



Follow us on social media for regular updates