



Ballybrown Equine Clinic



Ballybrown Equine Clinic, Ballybrown, Clarina, Co. Limerick, Ireland.

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EUTHANASIA

Guidance for a Difficult Decision

Difficult though it may be to contemplate, there may come a time when, for humane reasons, you need to consider euthanasia for your horse. Choosing whether, or when, to end an animal's life may be the hardest decision you ever have to make regarding your horse's welfare. However, it may be one of the most responsible and compassionate things you can do for your horse.

The decision to euthanase should never be made without careful consideration. The right choice is clearly the one that is in the best interest of the horse.

CONSIDER THE SITUATION

There are a wide range of circumstances under which euthanasia is a reasonable and responsible choice.

Among the most common are these:

- Incurable, progressive disease.
- Chronic, severe lameness.
- Inoperable colic.
- Foals born with severe defects.
- Debilitation in old age.
- Severe traumatic injury.
- Dangerous behavioral traits.
- Undue suffering for any reason.

Every case is unique. Even in similar situations, the decision to euthanase an animal is highly individual. For example, in the case of a severe traumatic injury, such as a broken leg, the animal's psychological makeup can influence the outcome. Some horses may respond better to treatment than others; some are more co-operative than others and some have a higher pain tolerance than others.

Euthanasia must be addressed from a practical standpoint, whether you are dealing with an emergency or a long term illness, discuss the following with your vet to help you decide what is right for your horse:

- What is the likelihood of recovery or at least a return to pasture soundness or some level of usefulness?
- Is the horse suffering?
- How long will the horse experience the current level of pain or debility?
- What kind of special care will the horse require, and can you meet its needs?

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- Can you continue to provide for the horse financially?
- What are your alternatives?

THE VET'S ROLE

As the horse's owner, you ultimately have the responsibility for determining your horse's fate. Your vet can provide you with medical information and help you fully understand the implications for the horse's future; however, your vet cannot make the decision for you. In extreme emergencies a vet may assume the responsibility for this decision, acting on an animal's behalf without the owner's consent. An example of such a situation is a horse that gets loose on a road and is struck by a car and severely injured. In this situation, the attending vet may decide to euthanase the horse immediately to end its suffering.

Remember the vet must follow their conscience. A vet may refuse to euthanase an animal if euthanasia seems unnecessary or unjustified. Or the vet may choose to discontinue treatment if an owner is inhumanely allowing an animal to suffer or is unduly prolonging its death.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

If you and your vet agree that euthanasia is the best choice, it is important to prepare as best you can.

1. Decide where the procedure is to be carried out; bearing in mind that arrangements must be made for the removal of the body.
2. Make arrangements in advance (where possible) for the prompt removal and disposal of the body, your vet will be able to advise you on the necessary arrangements.
3. If the horse is insured, notify the insurance company in advance so that there are no problems with claims. While the vet will provide you with any necessary documentation, the rest (notification, filing, follow-up etc.) is your responsibility.

INSURANCE CONSIDERATIONS

If the horse is insured, become familiar with the regulations concerning your policy- including the fine print- before you act. Most insurance carriers require that they be kept fully informed from the beginning about a horse's medical condition, especially if death or euthanasia is a potential outcome. Even in an emergency, a reasonable attempt should be made to notify the insurance company. This notification is the owner's responsibility. Many policies require a second opinion before the horse is euthanased. However, under extreme circumstances, it is always up to the discretion of the owner and vet to act in the best interest of the horse. Being aware of your policy's guidelines can minimize any unpleasant surprises relating to your claim.