

Saying goodbye

to your beloved horse



RSPCA 

There are times when it is in the best interest of a much-loved horse to be humanely euthanised.

This information may guide you through this difficult time, and help you make important decisions related to your horse's welfare.

Understanding the process and planning ahead can help you to make better decisions for you and your horse.

The right time

As a horse owner, it is up to you to recognise the right time and when euthanasia is the best decision for the welfare of your horse.

Sadly, the need to consider euthanising your beloved horse may be the result of an accident resulting in an untreatable injury, a disease causing pain and suffering or old age, reducing your horse's quality of life.

It may be difficult to judge the level of comfort your horse is experiencing, particularly in old horses afflicted with chronic diseases or conditions. When the choice between euthanasia and treatment is unclear, consider whether the horse is having more good days than bad.

Signs of poor health include loss of appetite, severe weight loss, difficulty in moving and increased time lying down.

Other important factors you should consider when making this decision include the cost associated with the treatment and management of the horse's condition and the nursing time required. If the horse requires treatment several times a day, every day, over a long time, could you manage this additional workload with the other commitments in your life?

Who can help you?

When you are faced with the option of euthanasia, you need to consider how you will undertake this and who should assist. The skills of the person assisting will ensure your horse does not experience pain or distress. As a caring horse owner, your horse's welfare will remain your biggest concern at all times, so it is important that you and your horse feel comfortable with the person who is assisting.

What happens?

There are two different options available when you decide euthanasia is the most humane decision for your beloved horse.

Injection

An injection can be administered by a veterinarian. The procedure usually only takes a couple of minutes and involves a sedative, followed by a lethal intravenous overdose of anaesthetic medication.

Firearm

A firearm can be used to instantly euthanise your horse. This can be carried out by a veterinarian, a knackery representative or a person experienced in large animal euthanasia with a firearm license. The effects of a firearm are instant and painless for the horse.

Both of these methods may produce involuntary responses in the moments following, such as muscle tremors and jerking. Please rest assured, your horse is not suffering at this time.

Who can help?

The skill of the person assisting with your horse's euthanasia is critical. This person must be appropriately trained and must have experience in handling horses.

A veterinarian would usually be the first person you should call upon if you are concerned about the health of your horse. If experienced in horse care, your veterinarian may make the recommendation of euthanasia after examining your horse.

Some horse owners decide to contact their local knackery man to assist with the euthanasia. This person may euthanise your horse on-site or may transport the horse to another location if it is fit for travel. It is important to keep in mind, transporting your horse when it is unwell, in an unfamiliar environment, with unfamiliar handlers, may increase the stress and pain your horse experiences.

At no time should you consider this option if your horse is unfit for travel (this is inhumane and in breach of animal welfare legislation that protects the welfare of your horse).

For more information, please seek the advice of your local veterinarian.

What to do after euthanasia?

When faced with the difficult decision of euthanising your horse, you must consider what you will do with your horse after the euthanasia is performed. There are a few options to consider as detailed below.

Burial

You may choose to bury your horse on your property. When you have selected a location, it is important to contact your local council to ensure it is suitable when taking into account utility supplies for your property. Burial will also require the operation of heavy machinery.

Cremation

You may choose to cremate your horse although unfortunately this is likely to be the most expensive option. To find a cremation provider who can assist, refer to Animal Memorial Cemetery and Crematorium in your local business directory.

Knackery

You can contact your local knackery to investigate the cost of collecting your horse.

Grieving for your horse

It is normal to feel sadness and compassion for your horse while it is sick or no longer with you. The stronger the bond with your horse, the more likely you will experience immense sadness.

For many people, losing a horse can be more difficult than losing a human friend. There are many ways you can seek support at such a difficult time.

- Plan a farewell time. Consider whether you want to say good bye before, or after your horse is gone. Children may also benefit from being involved in the farewell process.
- Let yourself grieve in your own way, in your own time. There are no rules or time lines.
- Seek comfort from people who share your love of animals.
- Attend a Companion Animal Loss Support Group meeting at RSPCA Burwood East. Phone 03 9265 2111 to find out more information.
- Make a memorial of your horse. For example, plant a tree or hang a picture in memory of the happy times you and your horse have shared.
- Consider professional counselling or support through the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement. For more information, visit www.grief.org.au, email support@grief.org.au or phone 03 9265 2111. Alternatively, you may choose to contact another support group, Griefline by phoning 03 9596 7799 (noon to 3am).



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