

Fact Sheet

Euthanasia

Making the right decision

Sometimes in life we are faced with making very difficult decisions. The majority of horse owners will one day be faced with the inevitable situation of needing to have their horse put to sleep (euthanased). It is often something that people, in general, are quite unprepared for.

Whether it is during an emergency colic, or the decision to have an old pony put to sleep, the decision to euthanase is never easy. Some examples of situations where your horse may need to be euthanased include fractured legs, persistent or chronic recumbency, emaciation or if they are terminally ill.



Planning ahead

Whilst we appreciate that this subject is not something owners want to think about, we urge everyone to make a plan for euthanasia so that there is no need to gather information and make decisions during a stressful and upsetting time.

Talking things through with your vet now can take a lot of the stress out of the situation when it occurs.



Methods of euthanasia

Injection of drugs - that induce depression of the central nervous system, the cardiovascular system and the respiratory system resulting in unconsciousness and cardiac arrest. This method can only be undertaken by a veterinary surgeon. Once your horse is deceased they cannot be used for human/animal consumption.

Gun or pistol shot - This method is quick and can be performed by a non veterinary surgeon who is licensed to perform this task. The carcass may be suitable for use for animal consumption but cannot enter the human foodchain.

Sedation can be used in most cases and this is something you can discuss with your veterinary surgeon. They can also discuss in detail the options available and answer any questions you may have.

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What will happen next?

In the event of sudden death or if your horse is euthanased at home, you will need to arrange for removal of your horse's body. To assist you at this stressful time, arrangements can be made by our reception staff, acting on your behalf, for your horse to be collected by a licensed equine crematorium operator. These operators will invoice you directly for this service.

Cremation can be:

Group cremation - the body will be cremated with other horses. In some cases you can have a token of the total ashes returned to you.

Individual cremation - your horse is cremated on its own and the ashes can be returned to you in either a casket or a scattering box. This will cost more than mass cremation.

The operators will usually invoice owners direct. The cost may be influenced by the time of day, the size of the horse and your location.

Some local drag hunts also provide euthanasia by bullet and a sympathetic removal service, in some circumstances this is a more economical option worth considering.

In Scotland and Wales, only pet horses can be buried. In England, you're allowed to bury horses whether they are pets or not. For further information, contact your local trading standards office and the Environment Agency.

Summary

Regardless of whether your horse is old and has lived a happy life or they are young and did not have the life you had hoped for them, deciding it is time to say goodbye is one of the most emotionally tough times for a horse owner. Being able to save your horse from unnecessary suffering at the end is the ultimate gift you can give.

Ensuring a pain-free, peaceful death is the kindest thing an owner can do for a much loved horse.



This factsheet was originally published on 15/02/21 and last reviewed on 26/02/25. It will be reviewed annually/ as necessary.

This factsheet was created by the VetPartners Equine Team, with assistance from our Marketing Team and Veterinary Regulatory Advisors.

For further information, please contact your local VetPartners Equine Veterinary Practice on:

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VetPartners Equine has a diverse range of practices and expertise within the group.

Together with our practices, our focus is on providing an excellent service to our equine clients.

No two practices are the same, and we understand and embrace that independent spirit.