

## **Exercise: Monitoring my pet's well-being**

The idea of this exercise is to work with your vet to create a suitable checklist to help you monitor any gradual or sudden changes in your pet's health, some of which might need to be reported to your vet team without delay. It includes suggestions and examples of things to look for, but it will depend on the type of animal you have, and what

you and your vet consider is relevant for your particular pet. The blank spaces on the right are there for you to write down what your vet advises for each point. You can delete or add things to the list as needed, such as any other issues you want to ask your vet.

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Noticing changes in my pet

What I need to do about it

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**Behaviour:**

- Unusual reactions, such as showing aggression
- Having no interest in things they usually like
- Being withdrawn and possibly hiding
- Appearing to be confused or disorientated

**Physical condition:**

- Weight loss
- Lack of appetite or reduced enthusiasm for food
- Any difference in their coat
- Any new lumps and bumps
- Any swelling around their girth or waist

**Ability to move:**

- Difficulty in standing, lying down, walking or moving about
- Reluctance to move or be handled
- Struggling to relieve him or herself, for example needing help to go into the garden to wee or poo

**New symptoms:**

- Coughing or sneezing
- Being sick
- Severe lack of energy
- Bladder or bowel incontinence
- Moaning or crying
- Breathing rapidly or panting without obvious cause
- Any other new signs which cause you concern

**Questions:**

- What signs and symptoms mean that I need to contact the vet urgently?
- What other things do I need to be aware of?

**Anything else that is worrying you**

**Make sure you know:**

- Opening times of the surgery
  - Contact details for your vet outside of normal hours
  - Cost for emergency appointments (if you need to know this for your budget)
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Being aware of any ongoing changes in your pet means you will notice potentially important symptoms early on and will know what to do, for example when and how to get in touch with your vet team for advice. It will also enable you to give your vet a useful report at any follow-up appointments and ask about anything else that is particularly concerning you.

Your vet might also give you specific markers which could indicate that your companion animal's quality of life is deteriorating to the point where, in order to avoid unnecessary suffering, you need to consider if it is time to say your final goodbye.

Caring for a beloved companion who is coming to the end of life can be a daunting process; but know that you are being courageous by doing all you can to keep him or her comfortable during the time they have left, as well as preparing yourself to make the important decision to say goodbye when that is the kindest thing to do. This well-known saying is a popular adaptation of a prayer written by an American theologian and may bring comfort during this time:

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
The courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.

(Reinhold Niebuhr, 1932–1933)

If your pet is one of the species, such as birds, rabbits or donkeys, that have evolved to hide their illness which in the wild would have made them vulnerable to predators, signs of illness are much more difficult to notice, and by the time it becomes obvious that they are unwell, generally urgent attention is required. Your vet will be able to advise you about this.