

End of Equine Life

As a horse owner putting your horse to sleep (euthanised) can be the most difficult decision you will have to make.

There can be a lot of information to process and decisions to make, which is why it is an important topic to talk about. Your vet practice is there to help you and support you through your decision.

Euthanasia generally falls into two categories, planned and emergency. Making a decision to say goodbye can be devastating, but ultimately is also the last kind and respectful thing to you can do for your horse to prevent any suffering. In the case of an emergency the 'decision' may have been taken out of your hands, but it doesn't make saying goodbye any easier.

There are a number of options available when it comes to euthanasia but at our practice we use the two more common options.

Euthanasia by Injection

Prior to receiving the injection the vet will sedate your horse, to help make the process safer.

A catheter will be placed into the horse's vein and if possible the horse will be walked to a safe, open area where sedation will be administered. Once the sedation has started to take effect, the Euthanasia injection will be given by the vet. As the horse relaxes they will go down onto their side and pass away. This process is relatively quick and is painless for the horse.

Euthanasia by Captive Bolt

Most veterinary practices work alongside local animal recovery services to offer this option. If you decide to use the Captive Bolt to put your horse to sleep, the vet will come and sedate your horse prior to the captive bolt being used to make the process safer.

If possible, the horse will be walked to a safe, open area where sedation will be administered. Once the sedation has started to take effect, the Captive Bolt will then be used, followed by a pith. This is a very quick process and one that is loud. Please be aware that there may be some blood.

At Loch Leven Equine Practice we offer our clients a service where they can drop their horse off at the clinic, say their goodbyes and leave. Our highly trained team will then be on hand to see your horse is relaxed and comfortable beforehand and whilst the process is taking place.

Post euthanasia

Once the horse has been euthanased we need to think about removal of the body. This can be really distressing as a horse owner, so if possible ask a friend to be there instead.

If you wish to bury your horse then you need to contact your local authority to get permission before euthanasia takes place. Most people choose to have them collected by a recovery service, although this of course comes at a cost.

Some recovery services offer options of joint or individual cremation and will be happy to discuss this with you.

Following the death of a horse it is a requirement to notify the passport agency.

Euthanasia and insurance

When it comes to making a claim for the death of your horse insurance companies will only usually cover your horse for euthanasia on humane grounds and there are strict guidelines which must be met.

Your horse's condition must meet certain criteria as set out by BEVA. The BEVA guidelines state, "If the horse sustains an injury or manifests an illness or disease that is so severe as to warrant immediate destruction to relieve incurable and excessive pain and that no other options of treatment are available to that horse at that time".

This essentially deals with the EMERGENCY situation, for example on a racecourse, event or at a road accident, where immediate action must be undertaken by the attending veterinary surgeon. The vet's primary responsibility is to ensure the welfare of the horse.

Examples of conditions which warrant immediate destruction:

- Colic where the horse is in terminal shock or that have no likelihood of survival
- Spiral/multiple fractures of the pastern, compound long bone fractures, displaced fractures in adult horses
- Pelvic fractures where the horse cannot get up
- Complete rupture or laceration of some/multiple tendons
- Blind in both eyes

The loss of an equine friend, no matter what the circumstances can be a truly devastating time. The British Horse Society run a 'Friends at the End' support group which can be found at <http://www.bhs.org.uk/welfare-and-care/euthanasia-and-friends-at-the-end>.

If you would like any additional information please call us on 01577 841010.

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