



MONITORING YOUR DONKEY'S **QUALITY OF LIFE**

A good quality of life is something that we want for all donkeys because it means a life free from pain and discomfort that is enriching and enjoyable. This can be measured by their health, comfort and happiness.

 27 April 2020  [Read on The Donkey Sanctuary website](#)

Donkeys have a very stoic nature, which means they are good at hiding their pain. As donkeys age, painful conditions like arthritis, dental disease, foot problems, and breathing issues become more common. These conditions can easily go unnoticed and a donkey's quality of life may gradually deteriorate.

Remember to think about the quality of life of younger donkeys as well as the older donkeys. Some conditions will mean that a young donkey is suffering pain or persistent discomfort. A donkey of any age may have a poor quality of life.

Making the decision to **euthanase** (also known as 'putting an animal to sleep') your donkey is extremely hard and always a sad decision. It can lead to feelings of guilt alongside the normal mourning process. Considering your donkey's quality of life may help with your decision to say goodbye. When your donkey's quality of life deteriorates, or if your donkey no longer has a 'good life', euthanasia is an act of kindness.

Careful, regular monitoring of your donkey will help highlight any subtle changes in behaviour. Record your observations, either in a diary or on the form we have produced and tested specifically for the purpose.

MONITORING PACKS

In response to this project, we have produced the Quality of Life: Owner Monitoring pack. The pack contains two pads of assessment forms; one pad for you, the owner, and one for your vet, farrier or dental technician. The vet pad is self-duplicating so your vet can give you a copy of their assessment. You can use this for your own reference and to share with anyone else visiting your donkey to provide care.

This can be purchased from our shop as part of the [Donkey Owners Care Pack](#).

You can also download printable PDF's of the assessment charts.

[Quality of Life Assessment Record Card - Owners](#)

39.76 KB PDF

[Donkey Weight Estimator Chart](#) 61 KB PDF

[Donkey Body Condition Score Chart](#) 71.53 KB PDF

[Example Diets: Mature, pregnant and lactating donkeys](#)

45.91 KB PDF

HOW TO MONITOR YOUR DONKEY

Fill the form in regularly (daily, weekly or monthly). Your observations will give a good indication of the health and, importantly, welfare of your donkey. They will make it easier for you to see signs of improvement or deterioration in your donkey's quality of life. Discuss the findings with your vet, farrier, and dental technician.

Experienced professionals that have worked with lots of donkeys will know what to watch for and may notice some deterioration that is hard for you to spot when seeing your donkeys every day. It is also much easier for someone to help you to make judgements when they don't have the huge emotional attachments that you have for your donkey.

We have produced a similar assessment tool for your vets and other health professionals. This may help with treatment decisions.

These records will allow you to have an informed and objective discussion with your vet if the welfare of your donkey becomes compromised (such as when painkillers no longer control your donkey's arthritic pain). The aim is to help you recognise when the time has come to say goodbye, and to reduce your feelings of guilt.

Growing Old Gracefully is a film aimed at owners of older donkeys and provides advice and guidance on the specific care needs of donkeys that are aged over 20 years old and common ailments that may affect them.

END OF LIFE STUDY

A three-year study into donkey and horse owner attitudes to equine end of life was coordinated by Advancing Equine Scientific Excellence (AESE) and supported by The Donkey Sanctuary and World Horse Welfare.

The project found that:

- Owners believe vets play an important role in supporting them when making the decision to euthanase their donkey at the most appropriate time.
- Owners and vets often conduct quality of life assessments on an informal basis. However, without recording this information, they cannot refer back to it when monitoring ongoing health conditions.
- There may be differences between an owner's perception of quality of life and the factors assessed by a vet. Owners wanted to understand this and discussions with their vet were considered to be important.
- Owners asked for more information on geriatric care and quality of life assessment.

MORE INFORMATION

Our skilled and experienced team of welfare advisers are on hand to give advice and appropriate support during office hours. If you're having problems caring for your donkeys or mules, [contact our welfare team](#) or telephone 01395 578222 and ask to be put through to the welfare department.