



Hampden Equine
Veterinary Practice

A Final Farewell

**A guide for horse owners on
helping you make the right decision**





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. All our team at **Hampden Equine Veterinary Practice** are animal lovers and many of us have had to say goodbye to our own animals over the years and so we understand how painful this can be.

The decision of when to have your horse euthanased does rest with you unless it is an emergency situation.

Although this guide may be difficult for you to read, it is much better for you to know what is involved, so that you are well informed and prepared in advance, of the options available.

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.

It may be time to consider euthanising elderly horses when they regularly have difficulty getting up after lying down.

Other examples include failure to respond to therapy, aggressive or dangerous behaviour.

Quality of life is defined by your horse's overall mental and physical wellbeing. Remember, it's not only senior horses that are euthanased due to their quality of life.

What factors should be considered when evaluating quality of life?:

- Is your horse's general health good?
- Are they in pain?
- Can your horse move around comfortably?
- Can your horse still lie down and get up easily?
- Is your horse maintaining a healthy bodyweight?

We are always available to talk to owners who are considering this difficult decision and would encourage you to speak to us about the options available, if and when the time comes.

Please do not hesitate to contact any of our veterinary surgeons or receptionists for more details.

The procedure

There are two options of euthanasia - lethal injection or bullet. An appointment can be made at your convenience (unless in an emergency situation) for one of our vets or a registered gun licence holder to come to your yard to perform the euthanasia. We will always ensure that we talk you through the process fully so that you are aware and prepared.

When your horse is euthanised by lethal injection they may be sedated to ease the procedure, and may become a little wobbly on their feet. At this point your vet will slowly inject the drug directly into the vein. The drug used is a concentrated form of an anaesthetic agent. After a few minutes, you commonly see a few deep breaths and the horse collapses to the floor. Unfortunately, we cannot control which way, or how they collapse, however our vets will try to guide your horse down the best they can. As soon as you see the deep breaths and their knees start to give way, your horse is anaesthetised, and totally unaware of what is happening.

Once down, your horse will drift into unconsciousness until their heart stops. This typically only takes a few minutes.

The other option is via a firearm. Using a free bullet, the horse is sometimes sedated first or is distracted by eating a bucket of feed, depending on their temperament. It is a very efficient

and quick way of euthanasia. The muzzle of the gun is placed against the horse's forehead and the bullet is discharged into the brain, killing the horse immediately.

Once the horse has been shot it falls immediately to the ground. There may be some involuntary reflex movement of the legs, but the body is generally quite still. Occasionally there is some bleeding from the bullet hole and nose.

If you would like to choose this method then we can arrange a suitably experienced person to carry out the procedure, you may request that we attend also in case sedation is required.

Should you be present? Many people choose to be with their horse during their final moments. It can be a very upsetting experience and so we recommend that you have a friend there with you. We do understand if you choose not to be there as we know how distressing this can be for you.

What will happen next?

In the event of sudden death or if your horse is euthanased at home, you may have 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 and at current prices you may expect a bill in the order of £260-£300 for group cremation, with no return of ashes.

There is also the option of individual cremation with ashes returned in either a casket or a scattering box. Some local hunts also provide euthanasia by bullet and a sympathetic removal service, in some circumstances this is a more economical option worth considering.

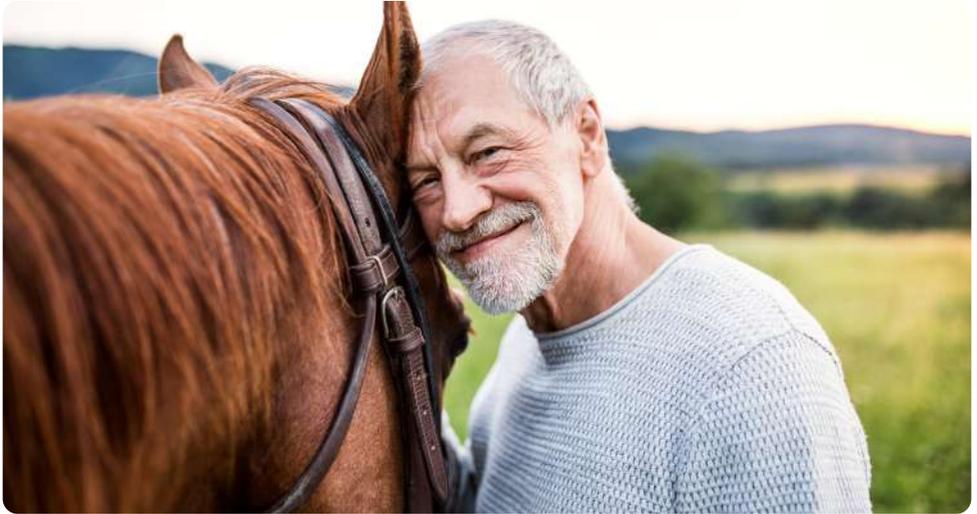
All such arrangements are between you and the operator.



If you have the facilities to bury your horse on your own land, there are very strict guidelines that must be adhered to, as horses are generally considered farm animals by government authorities.

**For further information, please refer to:
[gov.uk/guidance/fallen-stock](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/fallen-stock)**

Bereavement



Bereavement is the time we spend dealing with loss. Grief is the sorrow we feel during this time which can manifest itself in a number of ways.

There isn't a set of rules for dealing with grief or a set time scale. Every relationship between an owner and their horse is unique and whilst most owners can feel degrees of sadness, longing, anger, guilt, numbness, loneliness and denial, the mix and depth of these emotions can vary considerably.

During bereavement, it is important that owners find ways to mourn their loss and express their grief.

The bereavement period can be a confusing time involving a lot of very powerful emotions.

Not everyone experiences the same stages of bereavement at the same time, to the same degree or in the same order. However, most people generally go through the following four stages at some point:

- Accepting that your loss really happened
- Experiencing the pain that comes with grief
- Trying to adjust to life without your horse
- Moving on

No-one should be judged for their reaction to the loss of a horse. People need to come to terms with the death in their own time and shouldn't be pressured by others to move on.

Bereavement

Some people are pragmatic in their outlook to both life and death and are able to move on quickly. This doesn't mean they did not love their horse dearly.

For other people the loss of a horse can be like a huge cloud over them, rendering them unable to cope with day-to-day life. This can last for days, weeks, months and in extreme cases years.

If you are making the decision to have your horse put to sleep or if you know that your horse's health is failing and you are expecting them to pass away, you can suffer from anticipatory grief. This form of grief may include all the feelings associated with grief after their passing but also may encompass fear of life without your horse. Anticipatory grief is a lot more common than most people think and is perfectly normal. It does not mean that you are failing your horse in any way or giving up on them.

There are equine bereavement services available to help, support and give guidance, which are free services:

Friends at the end (British Horse Society)

02476 840517

bhs.org.uk/our-work/welfare/our-campaigns/friends-at-the-end

Blue Cross

0800 0966606

bluecross.org.uk/pet-loss

The death of your horse is not a subject that most people like to think about. However, it is important to consider what you will do and to plan ahead so that you will be able to cope with any eventuality. Please talk to your vet or the reception team at the practice if you require any further information.

If you would like to book an appointment for euthanasia, then please call our team who will guide you through the process.

“What we have once enjoyed deeply we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us.”

Helen Keller



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