

A Note From Allyson - December 2014

Over the last few months, we have been presented with a recurring issue. It's not a pleasant topic, but one that merits discussion. I apologize for addressing such a difficult matter during the holidays, but there is no time like the present, especially with winter coming.

When should you, as a caring horse owner, humanely euthanize your precious equine partner? It's probably the most difficult dilemma a horse owner will ever face. It's not easy to know when to act. You obviously want to give the horse every opportunity to survive and thrive, but ultimately that is not always going to happen. So, what is a responsible, loving horse owner to do?

Acute injury, sudden or prolonged illness, and advanced age are the most common reasons for an animal to be put down. The decision can be excruciatingly painful and difficult for even the strongest person. In addition, complex moral, ethical and legal standards are involved. I'd like to offer some thoughts regarding factors to consider as you navigate this most heartbreaking of decisions.

The first question you should ask yourself is "what is best for the horse?". Allowing a horse to experience endless pain and suffering is never in her best interest. You must carefully balance the likelihood of recovery with the amount of suffering the horse is enduring. In cases of injury and illness, you must also consider your financial ability to see the horse through a perhaps prolonged battle, and balance the horse's likelihood of recovery with those potentially crippling costs. Give yourself permission to take this important factor into consideration.

When it comes to geriatric horses, your primary responsibility is to make sure you are providing for their special needs. Some horses live well into their 30s without needing special care. Others, usually due to dental issues or decreased nutrient absorption, require extra effort. Senior feed, feed in larger quantities, dietary supplements, roughage the horse can ingest, alfalfa hay or alfalfa cubes, regular de-worming and regular dental and veterinary exams are all essential. You may have to make a warm mash for the horse who has few or worn out teeth. But you must do what it takes.

If you've provided all of this care and your horse continues to lose weight and becomes emaciated, the only humane action is euthanasia. A horse who cannot ingest food and hay to the nourishment of his body will DIE OF STARVATION! Starvation is painful and inhumane.

[Click here](#) (caution - disturbing photo) for a picture of an elderly horse wasting away because she cannot properly ingest food and absorb nutrients. This is a

horse from an actual case we worked in Smith County, Texas. Any objective person can see that allowing this deterioration is unacceptable and cruel.

The laws of most states, including Texas, allow that humane euthanasia is part of providing proper care to a horse. So, as a horse owner, if you allow your geriatric horse to decline to the point of starvation, you are at risk for violating animal cruelty statutes. Texas law forbids an owner from unreasonably depriving his horse of necessary food, care and shelter. So, despite the fact that you may be putting food and hay in front of your horse, if that horse cannot ingest and absorb the food properly, you are at risk of being found responsible for depriving the horse of necessary care. More importantly, you are allowing an animal to suffer needlessly.

(continued from eNewsletter)

Please understand that I am not advocating the euthanasia of any horse at the first sign of trouble. We prove every day that The Pegasus Project is dedicated to the rehabilitation and rejuvenation of each horse's mind, body and spirit. We go to great lengths to ensure the physical and mental well being of every horse with whom we come into contact. But, we firmly believe that once every reasonable effort has been made and, for whatever reason the horse cannot live free of significant suffering, we as their advocates must act on their behalf.

The bottom line is that responsible horse owners need to exercise common sense and exhibit great courage. The decision to end an animal's suffering is a courageous one. It is a decision that requires you to put aside your wishes and desires and act in the best interest of your beloved horse despite your own emotional pain and suffering.

These noble and glorious creatures bring us such joy and amazing companionship during their time on this earth with us. They have earned the right to receive our compassion in return. We owe it to them to be strong and courageous when the time comes to release them from their suffering.

If you have questions or comments regarding this matter, or if you have suggestions for future topics of discussion, I welcome you to contact me at allyson@mypegususproject.org.

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