

Quality of Life & DNR

by Paul Dewey, This Old Cat

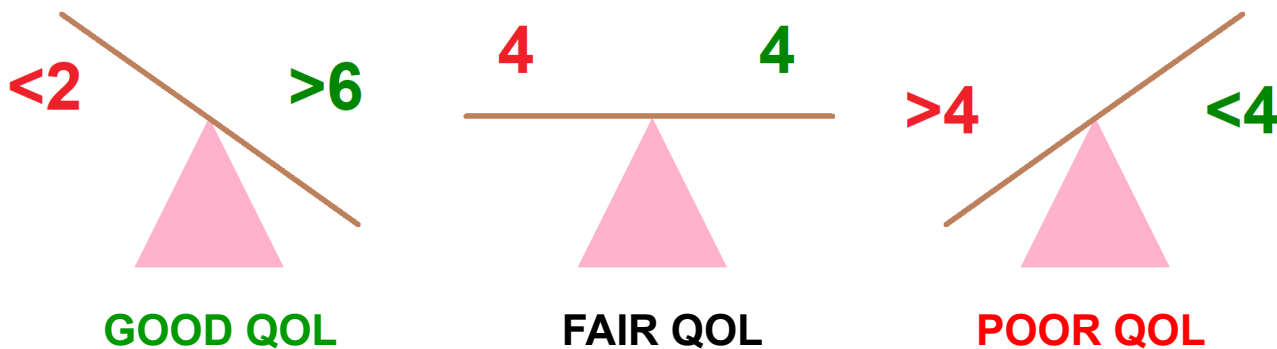
The basic tenet of all medical practice is *primum non nocere* – "First, Do No Harm."

For 35+ years now we have been caring for geriatric cats, cats with terminal diseases and/or cats with disabilities. So while there is no black & white measurement for quality of life (QOL) we have come to know what we feel are the signs. What we use to gauge quality of life are indicators such as (in no particular order):

- ★ Having pain under control
- ★ Good levels of activity and ease of movement
- ★ Good appetite
- ★ Good hydration
- ★ Taking medications with very little or no stress
- ★ Maintaining weight
- ★ Alertness to stimulation from their surroundings
- ★ Good litter box habits

A cat owner should make themselves aware of the QOL indicators. They should not be ones to give up early if they feel there is hope -- *however* they also should not be fans of prolonging life merely for the human's sake once they see the quality of life scale tip from good to poor. Consider the **eight QOL indicators** listed above and how they may tip the QOL scale one way or another:

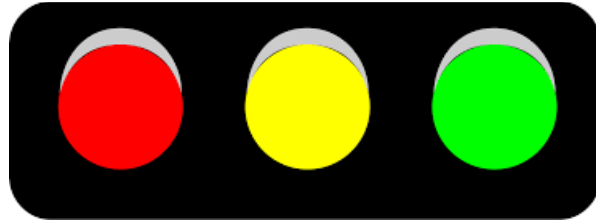
if 6 or more are good: **if 4 are good but 4 are not good:** **if 4 or more are not are good:**



Of course each cat, each situation may be different. But one must firmly believe that it always is about the cat truly living & thriving and not merely surviving. One also should be willing to learn to tell the difference between a cat just having an "off day" and a cat starting down the path of "mere survival" towards a poor quality of life.

For many cat owners the QOL discussion is one they often avoid. But because by nature humans far outlive felines this is a discussion that needs to take place. We usually are able to get clients to open up and start expressing their feelings by showing them our *RED-YELLOW-GREEN Resuscitation Authorization Options for Your Cat* (next page). We always say we hope they'll never have to use this, but it's very helpful and reassuring to have it.

Many of our clients tell us they appreciate a QOL discussion as it gets them thinking about what would be best for their cat. The better prepared cat owners are the better life will be for their cat, striving to live by the *primum non nocere* motto.



RED-YELLOW-GREEN Resuscitation Authorization Options for Your Cat

"Red" --- This is a clear D.N.R. (do **NOT** resuscitate) for the veterinarian. When, keeping the cat's best interest in mind, the veterinarian believes there clearly are no signs of hope that the cat will recover with a good quality of life.

"Yellow" -- This gives the veterinarian the OK to perform CPR and/or other minimum resuscitation procedures should the cat suddenly “crash”. This is a guarded choice when, keeping the cat's best interest in mind, upon consultation with the veterinarian it's determined there may *possibly* be a chance of recovery. They will at first try the minimum resuscitation procedures but will not continue from there if there are no signs of hope that the cat will recover with a good quality of life.

"Green" – This instructs the veterinarian to "do the 'Yellow'" BUT then also do everything above and beyond that, including but not limited to open heart massage, machine life support, etc., to keep the cat alive at all cost. **We must stress that this choice is extremely uncommon** to do because rarely is it in the cat's best interest, and it seldom results in a good quality of life for the cat. This option generally is associated only with a qualified referral specialist and/or emergency clinic capable of performing these often complicated and intricate procedures.

So consider these options carefully and chose wisely for the sake of your cat's quality of life. It's important that you ask questions and clearly communicate your wishes to your veterinarian and to anyone else directly or indirectly involved in the care of your cat. And don't wait – start the discussion now. Your cat will be glad you did.