

The Quality of Life Assessment Tool

HHHHHMM Scale for Dogs

Veterinarians use several assessment scales to help evaluate quality of life objectively. One of the most widely used is the HHHHHMM Scale, developed by Dr. Alice Villalobos.

Rate your dog honestly on each factor from 0 to 10 (0 = terrible, 10 = excellent). **A total score of 35 or less often indicates poor quality of life.**

1. HURT (Pain Management) Score: _____ /10

Questions to consider:

- Is your dog's pain adequately controlled with medication?
- Do they cry out, whimper, or show signs of pain regularly?
- Are they reluctant to move because it hurts?
- Do they flinch when touched?
- Is the maximum dose of pain medication no longer enough?

Signs of pain in dogs:

- Panting when not hot or after exercise
- Restlessness and inability to get comfortable
- Decreased appetite
- Withdrawal or unusual aggression
- Limping, stiffness, reluctance to move
- Changes in posture (hunched, tense)

2. HUNGER (Eating and Drinking) Score: _____ /10

Questions to consider:

- Is your dog still interested in food?
- Are they eating and drinking enough to maintain health?
- Do you have to hand-feed them or heavily coax them?
- Have they stopped eating even their favorite treats?
- Are they able to swallow without difficulty?

Red flags:

- Complete loss of appetite for more than 24-48 hours
- Unable or unwilling to drink water

- Vomiting or regurgitating most meals
- Weight loss despite your efforts

3. HYDRATION (Water Intake) Score: _____ /10

Questions to consider:

- Is your dog drinking adequate water?
- Are they showing signs of dehydration (dry gums, sunken eyes)?
- Can they physically reach and drink from their water bowl?
- Do you need to use a syringe to give them fluids?

4. HYGIENE (Grooming and Cleanliness) Score: _____ /10

Questions to consider:

- Can your dog keep themselves reasonably clean?
- Are they able to control bladder and bowel functions most of the time?
- If incontinent, is it manageable and not distressing for them?
- Are they developing sores from lying down constantly?
- Can they still be bathed and groomed without severe distress?

Dignity matters:

- Many dogs become distressed when they soil themselves
- If accidents are constant despite your best efforts, consider their mental distress
- Some dogs hide or show shame when they can't control bodily functions

5. HAPPINESS (Joy and Interest in Life) Score: _____ /10

Questions to consider:

- Does your dog still show interest in things they used to enjoy?
- Do they wag their tail, even weakly, when you interact with them?
- Do they show pleasure in anything - food, attention, sunlight, favorite spots?
- Are they responsive to your voice and touch?
- Do they still want to be with you, even if they can't move much?

This can be the hardest area to assess. Be honest and compassionate.

6. MOBILITY (Ability to Move) Score: _____ /10

Questions to consider:

- Can your dog still get up without significant struggle?
- Can they walk, even with assistance?
- Are they able to go outside to eliminate?
- Can they reach food and water without distress?
- If using mobility aids such as harnesses or carts, are they comfortable using them?

Important distinction:

- Limited mobility that is stable and comfortable - manageable
- Progressive loss of mobility that causes distress - quality of life issue

7. MORE GOOD DAYS THAN BAD Score: _____ /10

Questions to consider:

- Looking at the past two weeks, how many days were good vs bad?
- Good day - ate something, showed interest in something, appeared comfortable most of the day
- Bad day - clear discomfort, distress, disinterest, visible suffering
- If most days are mediocre or worse, that is a significant indicator

Total Score: _____ /70

Interpreting the score:

- Above 35 - Quality of life is acceptable. Continue supportive care and reassess frequently.
- 35 or below - Quality of life is poor. Have a serious conversation with your veterinarian about end-of-life options.
- Below 20 - Suffering is likely outweighing any remaining quality of life.

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