

NECROPSY PLANNING PACKET

The loss of your beloved hero can be difficult and overwhelming. While the necropsy is an invaluable final gift, it is not a requirement of the Study. No matter what, each hero’s lifelong contributions will make a difference. We want to ensure that Study owners have the resources and information to plan for a necropsy in advance and in unexpected circumstances. This guide seeks to minimize as much of the burden as possible during this challenging time.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Necropsy FAQ sheet	2
How to prepare for a necropsy in advance	2
How to prepare for an unexpected necropsy	3
Necropsy Planning Sheet	5
Necropsy Decision Making	7
Guide for After-Hours Necropsy Decisions	9
Necropsy Veterinarian Discussion Guide	10
Grief Support Resources	11

NECROPSY FAQ SHEET

How to prepare for a necropsy in advance:

STEP 1: Make sure you have a necropsy kit on hand

- Request an on-hand kit at grls.morrisanimalfoundation.org
- Current kits were created after Feb. 15, 2024, and **will have an orange “Azenta” sticker**
- Outdated kits can be recycled on the portal under “Return an unused kit”

STEP 2: Verify the amount of reimbursement you have available

- The cost of a necropsy can range from \$0-\$1,000+ depending on the facility. Always verify the cost in advance.
- Each participant has a **\$500** fund available to be reimbursed for any biopsy, cytology, or necropsy for the duration of the Study.
- Check with the [Study team](#) to confirm the amount of reimbursement available.

STEP 3: Decide what type of necropsy to have performed

- **Full:** A full-body, high-level necropsy involving the collection of tissues such as the brain and spinal cord.
 - Standard for universities and diagnostic facilities.
 - Cremation is an option but should be discussed ahead of time.
- **Partial:** Involves collection of diseased tissues and the following core tissues: liver, kidney spleen, heart, lung, and bone marrow.
 - Standard for Study vets and other veterinary clinics.
 - The amount of tissue collected is at the discretion and comfort level of the veterinarian.
- **Cosmetic:** The least invasive option. Includes the sampling of just diseased tissue (similar to a biopsy procedure).
 - ER clinics and general vet practices may be more willing and comfortable to collect minimal samples.
 - The only necropsy option where burial would be an option.

STEP 4: Determine where the necropsy will be done

- Any **willing** veterinarian can perform the necropsy.
- Use the discussion guide to check with your Study veterinarian (P.10)
- Search for a facility using a resource map compiled by volunteers:
<https://rpubs.com/aroeman/1242067>
- [Contact a volunteer](#) for assistance in finding a new facility. Contact form can be found under the Resources tab on your Portal page.

- **Always have a backup plan** (after-hours plan, a facility near a vacation home, etc.)
- Record information on the planning sheet (P.5)

STEP 5: Have a support system in place

- Ask 1-2 friends if they will be available to help with transportation, emotional support, etc. when the time comes. Provide them with your necropsy plan.
- Reach out to the [Study volunteers](#) as another means of potential support.
- Know where to access grief resources. (P.11)

STEP 6: Fill out the planning sheet and store the necropsy box in a safe place

- Save contact information for the facility or clinic where the necropsy will be performed on your phone.
- Put together a backup plan and instructions for what to do after hours.
- Consider where the necropsy will be performed if traveling and always leave instructions for pet sitters.

How to prepare for an unexpected necropsy:

STEP 1: Gather a support system that can help with transportation, planning, and emotional assistance

- Reach out to a close friend or family member.
- [Contact a volunteer](#) from the Study Golden Outreach Team.
- Use one of the Grief Support Resources (P.11)

STEP 2: Determine if a necropsy is possible

- The necropsy should be performed within **12-24 hours post-mortem**.
- The body should be kept cool, but **not frozen**.
- Review Necropsy Considerations (P.7)

STEP 3: Who will perform the necropsy?

- Any **willing** veterinarian can perform the necropsy.
- Search for a facility using the following resources:
 - [Necropsy Map](#)
 - [Necropsy Facilities List](#)
 - Filter "Study vets who perform necropsies" on the "Search Study Veterinarians" feature found on the portal page.

STEP 4: Consider the cost

- The Study can reimburse you up to \$500 for the necropsy unless those funds were previously used for a biopsy or cytology.
- The study is unable to cover the cost of euthanasia or cremation.

STEP 5: Do you have a necropsy kit?

- **If you have a kit:**
 - Check that it has an **orange “Azenta” sticker**. All current kits were made after Feb. 2024. **Previous necropsy kits can still be used, but the Study team will need to email replacement shipping labels.*
- **If you do not have a necropsy kit:**
 - A vet can perform the necropsy using the [Tumor Sampling and Necropsy Resources instruction guide](#) found on Morris Animal Foundation’s website.
 - The Study team can priority overnight ship the necropsy kit Monday- Thursday or the necessary shipping labels and submission forms can be sent by email.

STEP 6: Contact the Study team

- Please inform the Study team of dog death as soon as possible at GRDogs@caninelifetimehealth.org or 855-447-3647.

NECROPSY PLANNING SHEET:

GOLDEN RETRIEVER LIFETIME STUDY CONTACT CENTER:

Phone: (855)-447-3647

Email: grdogs@caninelifetimehealth.org

Hours: Mon, Tues, Thur 7 am – 4 pm MT and Wed, Fri 7 am– 12 pm MT.

AFTER-HOURS VOLUNTEER SUPPORT (POINT OF CONTACT):

Name (s): _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

STUDY VETERINARIAN INFORMATION:

Clinic: _____

Veterinarian: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Hours: _____

Willing to perform necropsy: yes/no (circle one) _____

EMERGENCY VET:

Clinic: _____

Veterinarian: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Hours: _____

Willing to perform necropsy: yes/no (circle one) _____

Necropsy Plan A:

Name of Facility: _____

Phone Number: _____

Hours: _____

After-Hours Protocol: _____

Cost: _____

Type of necropsy: Full | Partial | Cosmetic (circle one)

Cremation Preference: _____

Necropsy Plan B:

Name of Facility: _____

Phone Number: _____

Hours: _____

After-Hours Protocol: _____

Cost: _____

Type of necropsy: : Full | Partial | Cosmetic (circle one)

Cremation Preference: _____

Where is the necropsy kit currently located: _____

Support System:

Contact 1: _____

Contact 2: _____

Contact 3: _____

Instructions for Pet Sitters: _____

Need Help completing this form?

Contact a GO Team volunteer through the [Volunteer Support Request form](#) which is also located under the “Resources” tab of the Study portal.

NECROPSY DECISION MAKING

We understand that a necropsy procedure may not be possible under some circumstances, despite advanced planning. Please carefully consider the following when deciding whether to pursue a necropsy.

Emotional:	
<p>Are you comfortable having a necropsy performed?</p> <p>Would you like your dog's ashes? Would you like to bury your dog?</p> <p>Are you willing to transport the body and how far? If not, is there someone willing to assist you with transport?</p>	<p>Ensure that the veterinarian performing the necropsy understands your needs. If you wish to bring home your dog's ashes, you will need to make that clear to the veterinarian. This is called an individual cremation.</p> <p>If you wish to bring your dog home for burial, discuss a cosmetic necropsy with your veterinarian. In this case, your veterinarian will only collect essential samples to determine cause of death and will return your Hero to you for burial.</p> <p>If there is not a veterinarian in your area able to perform the necropsy, consider how far you would be willing to transport your Hero, or if a member of the Wrigley Factor would be available to assist you.</p>
Financial:	
<p>How much will the veterinarian charge?</p> <p>Do you still have your \$500 reimbursement available?</p> <p>Will reimbursement cover the total cost?</p>	<p>Please review the estimate with your veterinarian to determine if a necropsy is financially feasible for you.</p> <p>The Study allots up to \$500 for biopsy and necropsy reimbursement over a Hero's lifetime. Reimbursement may be requested by emailing an itemized invoice to GRDogs@caninelifetimehealth.org.</p>

Preparedness:	
<p>How familiar is the veterinarian with the Study?</p> <p>Do you or the veterinarian have a necropsy kit?</p> <p>Is the Study team available?</p>	<p>Necropsy samples can be collected with or without a necropsy kit. It is most beneficial for the Study if the samples are submitted to our partner laboratory, Zoetis Reference Labs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tissues should be collected in formalin using a container (or containers) with a tight-fitting lid. Use 10 parts of formalin to 1 part tissue, by volume. • Once tissue is in formalin, it is “fixed” and stable for several days. This is an excellent time for the vet to contact the GRLS Operations team. The team can provide shipping labels and additional instructions. <p>Instructions are also available at www.morrisanimalfoundation.org/grls-veterinarians</p>
Timeline:	
<p>How long has it been since the dog passed? Does the veterinarian have time to perform a necropsy?</p> <p>How long will the samples sit before they can be mailed?</p> <p>If necessary, do you have a location to store the body?</p>	<p>When a dog dies suddenly and your veterinarian is unavailable, we recommend an abbreviated necropsy procedure if that can be conducted within 12-24 hours post-mortem. Keeping the remains cool but not frozen preserves the tissue so it can be examined by a pathologist.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrap the body in a blanket and place in an attached garage or basement (cool outside temperatures). • Place the body in the coolest room of the house (warm outside temperatures). • If the remains are accidentally frozen, your vet can still proceed with the necropsy procedure but should limit tissue collection.

Sample Collection:	
Will you also be collecting clinical samples?	The necropsy kit contains materials for tissue and clinical sample collection. If not feasible, you may forgo clinical sample collection.
Will you be pursuing a Study vet, university, or partial/cosmetic necropsy?	Determine which extent of sample collection you are most comfortable with. University necropsies are the most in- depth, and you will not be able to bury your dog.
Was your dog’s death unexpected or is the cause of death unknown?	All necropsy types are beneficial to determining the cause of death of your Hero.

GUIDE FOR AFTER-HOURS NECROPSY DECISIONS:

We understand that a necropsy procedure may not be possible under some circumstances, despite advanced planning. When a dog dies suddenly and your veterinarian is unavailable, we recommend an abbreviated necropsy procedure if that can be conducted within 12-24 hours post-mortem. Keeping the remains cool but not frozen preserves the tissue so it can be examined by a pathologist.

COOL TEMPERATURES, BUT NOT FROZEN:

Keep the body cool (refrigeration temperature) but not frozen. This preserves the tissue and avoids formation of ice crystals.

- Wrap the body in a blanket and place it in an attached garage or basement (cool outside temperatures).
- Place the body in the coolest room of the house (warm outside temperatures).
- If the body is accidentally frozen, your vet can still proceed with the necropsy procedure but should limit tissue collection.

ABBREVIATED NECROPSY (12-24 HOURS POST-MORTEM):

The priority for the research study under unplanned circumstances is to understand contributing causes of death and to collect samples from any observed tumors, along with adjacent normal- appearing tissue.

- Tissues should be collected in formalin using a container (or containers) with a tight-fitting lid. Use 10 parts of formalin to 1 part tissue, by volume.

- Once tissue is in formalin, it is “fixed” and stable for several days. This is an excellent time for the vet to contact the GRLS Operations team. The team can provide shipping labels and additional instructions.

EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES:

Necropsy kits can be sent priority overnight Monday – Thursday. Kits that are overnighted on Fridays will arrive Monday.

If a necropsy kit is available, use the labeled containers, shipping labels, Zoetis histopathology order form and data collection form. Antech kits can be used so long as the shipping labels and forms are replaced.

If a necropsy kit is unavailable, documents and a shipping label can be emailed to the veterinarian.

NECROPSY VETERINARIAN DISCUSSION GUIDE:

Use the following document to help guide conversations with your Study veterinarian about their willingness to perform a necropsy when the time comes. While this topic can be difficult to discuss, deciding in advance will allow you to prepare for unexpected circumstances.

- **How familiar are you with the Golden Retriever Lifetime Study?**
- **What kind of necropsy would you be willing/able to perform (cosmetic, partial, full)?**

**A cosmetic necropsy is the least invasive option. It typically involves sampling diseased tissue for pathology like a biopsy procedure. A partial necropsy includes collecting diseased tissue, and several of the core tissues: liver, kidney, spleen, heart, lung, and bone marrow. A full necropsy is more involved and includes samples such as the brain and spinal cord. This necropsy is typically performed at a university or diagnostic facility. Most Study vets will perform a partial necropsy for the Study.*

- **If you are not able to perform the necropsy or my dog passes outside of business hours, is there another facility you would recommend nearby?**
- **Have you performed a necropsy for the Study in the past?**
- **Did you have a chance to review the “Necropsy Kit: Collection & Shipping Instructions for Veterinary” provided by the Golden Retriever Lifetime Study Team?**

**This guide is included in the necropsy kit and can be found on your veterinarian’s portal page as well as on the [veterinarian page](#) of our website.*

- **What days and hours are you available to perform the necropsy?**

**A necropsy must be performed within 12-14 hours after a dog passes.*

- **How much does your clinic charge for a necropsy?**

- **Would I be able to have my dog’s ashes returned after the necropsy?**

**Always discuss your wishes with the veterinarian prior to the necropsy. Make sure you discuss private versus public cremation if you would like your dog’s individual ashes returned. If you want your dog’s body returned, you will need to have a cosmetic necropsy.*

- **Do you need additional information, or would you like to speak directly to the Study team?**

**Supplemental information about the Study’s necropsy protocol can be found on our [website](#). This can also be viewed on your Study vet’s portal under Resources. The Study team can be reached at grdogs@caninelifetimehealth.org or (855)-447- 3647. Contact Center hours are Monday, Tuesday, Thursday 7am-4pm MT and Wednesday, Friday 7am-12pm MT.*

If you would like assistance discussing the necropsy with your Study veterinarian or finding a willing clinician, submit a [Volunteer Support Request](#) Form.

GRIEF SUPPORT RESOURCES:

Morris Animal Foundation Webinar – Navigating the End of Life in Our Beloved Pets:	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFojZHgrmw
Morris Animal Foundation Blog – Pet Loss and Grief:	https://www.morrisanimalfoundation.org/article/pet-loss-and-grief
Pet Loss Resource List:	https://vetsocialwork.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/276/2024/01/Pet-Loss-Resource-Listupdated-April-2018-.pdf
Lap of Love (Hospice vet w/ grief and QOL resources):	https://www.lapoflove.com/
Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement:	https://www.aplb.org/
Financial Aid Resources:	https://vetsocialwork.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/276/2025/04/2025-Financial-Resources-Services-List.pdf
Fetch-a-Cure Pet Loss Support Group:	https://vetsocialwork.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/276/2024/10/UT-VSWS-Grief-Packet-Summer-and-Fall-2024.pdf