

Declawing Your Cat

What is Declawing?

Declawing your cat is not a simple “nail removal” that most of us think it is. It involves an actual amputation of the digit, roughly comparable to taking your finger off at the first knuckle. This is an extremely painful procedure, and both the surgery itself and the recuperation period are very stressful on the cat. If the surgery is not done correctly, the cat can lose part of its pads, or later one of the claws can grow back and require another painful surgery to have it removed.

Common Reasons for Declawing

One of the most common subjects we get asked about is declawing. Despite the fact that it is illegal in most European countries and many animal shelters have a no-declawing adoption policy, some people view declawing as a necessary procedure for indoor cats. This is absolutely not true. The poorly manufactured products made for scratching that dominate the pet supply industry, as well as the lack of sound information available to clients, have left most feeling as though there were no alternative.

Why Do Cats Scratch?

Cats don't scratch simply to be destructive. There are several reasons why they scratch.

Cats' nails grow in layers, and they need to scratch on something to shed the outer sheath. If they don't, the nail will grow into their pad.

Cats have scent glands in the pads of their feet. They scratch to mark the area with their scent. This is why declawed cats still “scratch” at a post or furniture.

A cat will scratch on the post to relieve frustration or stress.

Why People Think They Should Declaw Their Cat

“My cat is destroying my furniture”

Cats will scratch, it's part of their nature and hygiene.

The key is to provide alternative scratching areas. A good scratching post, made with the right material, will turn out to be more attractive to your cat than your furniture. Also, consider that your cat's life span is sixteen years or more; he or she will be an important part of your family much longer than any furniture you have.

“My other cat is declawed”

Cats with and without nails can live together without any problems. Very rarely do cats use their claws on each other. For example, witness our adoption room, as well as countless others like it in shelters everywhere. There are always at least one or two already declawed cats that live peacefully among the rest of the cats that have claws.

“I don't want my cat scratching my children”

Cats are no more likely to scratch a child than they are to scratch another cat in the house, unless provoked. Teach your children how to pet and play with the cat, as well as how to watch for signs that the cat is getting over-stimulated or stressed and therefore needs to be left alone.

Also, keep the cat's nails trimmed. It's easy and painless, and it can help avoid accidental scratches and hurt feelings.

How Does Declawing Affect a Cat's Behavior?

Litter Aversion

Declawing a cat can lead to litter aversion, either immediately or even years later. They can associate pain with the litter box, because right after surgery they had to step into a litter box using their now-painful paws. Most behavior-related litter box problems occur in declawed cats.

Aggressive Behavior

Another serious behavior problem that can develop is aggression. A cat's first line of defense is its nails. When

he perceives that he no longer has that defense, he will use his next best option, his teeth. A cat bite is much more dangerous to humans and other animals than a cat scratch.

Defenseless Cat

Even if you are being responsible by not exposing your cat to the dangers of being outside, doors and windows do often get left open on occasion. A declawed cat that gets outside already has a major strike against him by not having all of his defenses against dogs and other cats. Unfortunately, if a declawed cat that gets outside should become lost for several days or longer, he will have a much harder time catching food than a cat that has all four sets of claws.

What are the Alternatives to Declawing?

Once owners understand scratching behavior and realize that it is not meant to be destructive, they are usually ready to explore other alternatives. There are several very simple things you can do to save your furniture and your cat's toes.

- Get your cats more scratching posts. Offer these as alternatives to your furniture. If you get the right scratching post, your cat will be much happier scratching on it instead of on your furniture.
- Posts made out of carpet do not work. The post should be made out of a fabric that is not similar to anything in your house, preferably a sisal-weave material. The cat condos made out of tree trunks and carpet are also great because cats like the feel of the bark.
- Short scratching posts do not work, either. A post should be tall enough for your cat to full stretch to the top, and it should also be sturdy.
- Make sure that you place your scratching post wherever the cats are presently scratching, or in a high "cat traffic" area. The cats will not use a post

that is placed in some corner that they never visit. If you also have a cat condo, place it at a window where it will get sunlight and attract your cat to use it. This is convenient because their favorite time to scratch is after taking a nap.

- Grass doormats and cardboard scratching pads can be used for those picky felines that prefer horizontal surfaces. To introduce your cat to his or her scratching post, sprinkle catnip on the area and use feather toys for them to chase up the post. This acts as both bonding time and positive reinforcement.

If your cat has begun scratching...

Temporarily place aluminum foil or two-sided tape on your furniture. Cats don't like the feel of those objects. Place the new scratching post next to this spot, since your cat will immediately look for a different surface after touching the foil or tape. You can also deter him with scented sprays like ginger or citrus.

Keep in mind that for kittens, there is a difference between scratching and using their claws to climb. They are unable to jump until they are larger, and so their climbing may be misconstrued as unwanted scratching behavior.

Remember: Keep the cat's nails trimmed. It's easy and painless, and it can help avoid accidental scratches and hurt feelings.

How to Properly Trim Your Cat's Nails

1. Hold the paw firmly in your hand.
2. Press gently on the pad to extend your cat's claws.
3. Using recommended nail trimmers, cut the nail close to the quick (pink area) without going into it.
4. We recommend visiting your local pet salon for more advice.

