



The Facts About Declawing: Is It Really That Bad? You Decide!

Cats have some interesting and unique behaviors. They rub up against you in an almost rhythmic dance pattern. They communicate their needs by meowing in a variety of voices and we eventually learn what each unique sound means. They crawl on your lap, purr, and knead you as if you are a loaf of bread: **OUCH!** They also have a very destructive but natural behavior: **SCRATCHING!**

We do not condone declawing. We consider this an inhumane, and in most situations an unnecessary, procedure. If you have exhausted ALL other alternatives, and you feel that you must either declaw or give up your cat, we would rather see your cat stay in the home and remain your lifelong companion. If you do decide to declaw we suggest you have the surgery done at the same time that he/she is neutered/spayed or under anesthesia for another surgery; that you **ONLY** declaw the front paws; and you **ALWAYS** keep your cat indoors.

The Cat's Claws

Most mammals' walk on the soles of the paws or feet, cats however walk on their toes. Their back, shoulder, paw, leg joints, muscles, tendons, ligaments and nerves are naturally designed to support its weight across its toes as it walks, runs and climbs.

What is Declawing?

Declawing is not just clipping the claws extremely short-it is surgery. Actually, an amputation to be exact, the first joint of each toe is amputated at the first joint (3rd phalanx bone). The medical term for declawing is an Onychectomy.

- Your cat receives a general anesthetic.
- The nails and foot area are scrubbed with surgical scrub and sterile saline and then swabbed with alcohol.
- A tourniquet is tied around each foot, to cut off the blood supply.
- Each nail is amputated with a guillotine nail cutter or scalpel blade to dissect through the joint, which cuts across the first joint through skin, ligaments, and nerve endings. The newest procedure is the use of lasers, it still is surgery, but has been proven to decrease blood loss, but not pain.
- Most veterinarians use a skin glue to close the surgery sight, however some may require suturing.
- The paws may require bandaging to prevent hemorrhaging, and to provide some padding. Your veterinarian removes the bandage in about 2 or 3 days.

Immediate: Possible Complications.

There are medical, physical, and emotional considerations to be aware of when you decide to have your cat declawed.

Physical

- ❖ There is the possibility of adverse reaction to general anesthesia.
- ❖ If the bandages are on too tight, circulation may be decreased resulting in infection.
- ❖ Many cats begin to hemorrhage when the bandages are removed; thus requiring additional bandaging.
- ❖ Your cat may experience mild discomfort to extreme pain.
- ❖ Complete healing can take up to a few weeks and can be a painful ordeal.
- ❖ You will need to provide your cat with shredded paper litter for the first couple of weeks. It is important that litter does not stick on their paws.

Emotional

Cats can feel pain just like any other animal; imagine what it must feel like to wake up to find out you have had your knuckles, or even just your fingernails removed!

- ✚ As your cat is waking in a groggy state, he can't understand why its paws are throbbing and bandaged.
- ✚ The first time he/she tries to walk, run, jump, stretch, and/or scratch, it may hurt; he may not want to walk because of the pain.
- ✚ He/she may stop playing, jumping, and interacting with you because simply walking is painful. Some cats get over it quickly; others may not be interactive for a long time.
- ✚ Chronic back and joint pain as shoulder and left muscles weaken.

Later: Possible Complications

Physical

- ❖ If the entire nail bed was not removed completely, the claws can grow back; usually, painful, deformed and useless.
- ❖ Re-growth of a nail is called a Sequestrum; due to improper removal of the bone at the time of surgery. If a nail grows back, take your cat to the veterinarian.

Emotional

- ✚ Frequently cats become distrustful of his/her owner and/or veterinarian. "With rare exception, the declawed cat is the most difficult to examine and treat", states Paul Rowen, D.V.M.
- ✚ A declawed cat is more likely to bite if he feels threatened, by another animal, a child, or even his surroundings.
- ✚ They are more likely to hide and become less social and active with you or other animals.
- ✚ Change in their environment or additions of new pets or people often cause them to hide or quit using their litter box.
- ✚ When adopted from a shelter they may display aggression and/or fearful behaviors, and may take a longer to adjust to a new family.

What can you do? About Scratching

Fortunately, we have a variety of options and products that make this annoying but natural behavior tolerable and fit for human habitation.

Scratching post:

This is the easiest and least expensive way to curb the need to scratch furniture. Provide him a suitable object to scratch, such as a scratching post. A suitable scratching post means suitable to him, not you.

All cats have different scratching preferences; these are some of the things to consider:

- Location, location, location
- Horizontal/vertical
- Stability
- Height
- Texture: carpet, sisal, wood or cardboard

It is rather easy to train your cat to use his scratching post consistently.

Claw Clipping: Clipping claws is easier than you think, if you make touching and pressing on their paws a daily ritual, they will be less stressed and/or agitated when you pick up their paws to clip them. You can use human fingernail or toenail clippers, baby or manicure scissors, or scissors made specifically for small animal nail trimming:

- ✓ Hold the cat on your lap until he is comfortable. If you can, turn him on his back and pet him until he is relaxed or almost asleep. Press gently on the top of the paw near the base of the nail to extend the claw.
- ✓ Hold the paw firmly with the claw extended. Clip off ONLY the curved end of the claw. If you clip into the thick part of the claw, (the pink area where the veins are located), you will hurt your cat. If you are not sure where to clip, or are uncomfortable, DON'T...Consult your veterinarian or groomer.
- ✓ If your cat yowls or fidgets when you clip, make sure you are not pressing too hard or tightly on your cat's paw, or that you did not cut too closely.
- ✓ When you are done give him a very special treat and a lot of extra praise and attention! Alternatively, if your cat is passive aggressive, let him play with a very active toy.

Follow the exact same procedure with each claw. Do not forget to praise, comfort, and/or distract your cat while you're doing this. If you have trouble, ask someone to help you. Cats seldom use their back claws to scratch inappropriately, but you may want to clip them anyway.

Soft Paws: They are painless soft vinyl nail caps that keep cats' nails blunt and harmless 4 to 5 times longer than routine nail trimming. The caps are durable and held in place by an adhesive. They are available in three sizes and a variety of fun colors. You may want your veterinarian or groomer to show you how to apply them initially.

- ✚ They usually stay on for 4 to 6 weeks, depending on the rate of nail growth and the activity level of your cat.
- ✚ They are easy to apply. You must first trim the nails, then apply the cap with a small amount of adhesive you stick it onto the clipped nail. Within a few minutes, the adhesive will be dry. By the time you are finished, the glue will be dry.

Desensitization:

This is a method to teach your cat to respond in a non-fearful or non-aggressive manner to an unpleasant situation.

- ✚ Begin by touching his paws at a level that doesn't cause any reaction, while offering a pleasant reward, such as a treat, or petting in his favorite spot.
- ✚ Keep repeating this; gradually introduce more intensity. Eventually you'll be able to hold his paw without any resistance.
- ✚ Then begin touching his paws with the clippers, and praise him as before.
- ✚ Clip one nail and praise, then another nail until you have completed a paw. You may be able to get only one or two nails done at first.
- ✚ If you sense that resistance is coming end on a positive note.

DO NOT FORCE the issue or you may have to go back to square one. No matter which method you decide upon, it will go much more smoothly if you practice this ritual continually. The more you touch and squeeze your cat's paws; the less it will become a traumatic event. This must be done very gradually. Keep repeating this; gradually introduce more intensity. Eventually you will be able to hold his paw without any resistance.

Consult With Your Veterinarian

If you continue to have difficulty or it's too stressful on you and your cat, your veterinarian can help you. DO NOT ATTEMPT to give your cat any over-the-counter or prescription medication without consulting your veterinarian. Your vet is the only person who is licensed and qualified to prescribe medication for your cat. Animals don't respond to drugs the same way people do, and a medication that may be safe for humans or dogs could be fatal to your cat. Drug therapy alone won't reduce fears and phobias permanently. In extreme cases, behavior modification and medication used together may be the best approach.

What Not To Do:

- ❖ Do not punish your cat for being afraid. Punishment will only make him more fearful.
- ❖ Don't try to force your cat to experience the object or situation that is causing him to be afraid.
- ❖ Animals don't understand punishment after the fact, even if it's only seconds later. Scratching or biting you is the result of panic, not misbehavior. Punishment will do more harm than good.