



## Declawing: The Facts

According to the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, **surgical declawing is NOT a medically necessary procedure for cats** in most cases. Scratching is a normal feline behavior and is a means for cats to mark their territory both visually and with scent, and is used for claw conditioning ("husk" removal) and stretching activity. In many European countries, it is illegal to declaw a cat.

Declawing of domestic cats should be considered ONLY after attempts have been made to prevent the cat from using its claws destructively or when clawing presents a zoonotic risk for its owner(s).

### What is declawing?

The surgical procedure is actually an amputation. Cats' claws are adhered to bone, so to remove the claw, the bone, nerves, joint capsule, ligaments, and tendons on each toe must all be amputated. This procedure is equivalent to amputating human fingers at the first knuckle.

### Why do cats need their claws?

Although most mammals walk on the soles of their feet, cats walk on their toes. Claws are necessary to maintain proper alignment of the cat's back, legs, and shoulders.

### How does declawing affect a cat?

- 1. Pain & potential complications from surgery**
  - Declawing is a painful procedure that can lead to nerve damage, chronic back and shoulder pain, and regrowth of deformed claws inside the paw.
  - Postoperative hemorrhaging, infection, and abscesses due to regrowth may occur, and abnormal growth at the severed nerve site can lead to life-long pain.
- 2. Potential psychological & behavioural changes**
  - Declawing removes a cat's primary source of defense, which may cause the cat to become fearful and withdrawn.
  - Declawed cats also often become aggressive biters because their teeth become their method of defending themselves once their claws are removed.

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### **3. Use of the litter box**

- Immediately following declawing surgery, using a litter box will be painful for cats due to the tenderness of the paws. Cats may associate the litter box with the pain they feel in their paws and develop an aversion to using the litter box.
- Cats use their claws as one method of marking territory. If the ability to mark with their claws is taken away, the cat may resort to marking with urine.

## **What are some options to declawing?**

### **1. Provide suitable scratching materials**

- Sturdy scratching posts, cardboard boxes, lumber or logs, and carpet or fabric remnants affixed to stationary objects are good alternatives.
- Scratching posts should be tall enough so that your cat can stretch up the entire length of his body.
- Rub catnip on the scratching post and show your cat how to use it.
- Put the scratching post close to where the cat scratches (e.g. the sofa).
- Praise your cat when he scratches the right things.

### **2. Care for your cat's claws**

- Trim your cat's claws to minimize any damage done by scratching.
- Ask your vet how to trim claws safely and properly.
- Ideally, start trimming the claws when the cat is young, but older cats can also be trained to cooperate with regular trimmings.

### **3. Try aversion techniques**

- Cover areas with double-sided sticky tape, sandpaper or aluminum foil.
- Attach cotton balls containing citrus or perfume or another safe yet unpleasant substance (be careful that the unpleasant odor doesn't cause acceptable objects to also smell bad).
- Provide suitable scratching areas and praise your cat when he uses them.

### **4. Provide loving attention**

- Regular exercise and play are important for controlling a cat's desire to scratch in inappropriate locations.
- Provide your cat with outlets for his energy and provide lots of love and attention.

**Source: Ontario SPCA, Newshound, September 2004, Volume 7, Issue 4.**