

Cats & Claws

After learning that declawing is not only a painful procedure for your cat, but actually removes a needed body part for movement and defense, most cat owners opt for alternatives to declawing. The information that follows explains the declawing procedure and provides suggestions for you to use so that you can live happily with your cat, claws and all!

THE DECLAWING PROCEDURE

The standard way to declaw a cat is to remove not only the claw, but also the cells at the base of the claw, and part or all of the terminal bone of the toe. Consider it as an amputation of part of the cat's body. To better understand this, think of it as removing the last part of your finger, all the way up to the joint closest to your fingernail!

Although it is done under anesthesia, after surgery most cats act as if they are in great discomfort. The cat's feet are tightly bandaged after surgery and the cat will experience throbbing. Once the bandages are removed, the feet will be painful to walk on. In addition, there is always some risk associated with anesthesia; there may be additional risks associated with infection or blood loss.

All declawed cats should remain indoors 100% of the time, as they have limited ability to climb to safety or defend themselves outdoors.

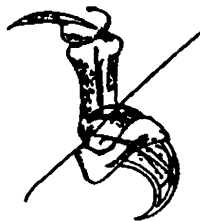
ALTERNATIVES TO DECLAWING

You can keep both a cat with claws and unclawed furniture in your home! Understanding your cat's needs will help you to supply the correct materials and training to make this situation possible.

Remember that scratching and stretching are a natural part of being a cat. You cannot punish your cat for the natural act of scratching with his claws, however you can provide your cat with a place to scratch that is acceptable for both you and the cat.



Claw Retracted



Claw Extended

(line indicates where declawing is performed)

Either purchase a sturdy scratching post or climbing furniture or build your own using sisal, wood and carpet scraps. Make sure the post is secure, so if the cat lunges at it with all his force, the post won't topple over.



Some people prefer to get a chunk of log for their cats to scratch on – many cats love this since it feels just like scratching on a tree! Logs can be scavenged from the woods or purchased at your local building supply store. Again, make sure you can secure the log upright.

Even if you only have one cat in your house, be sure to provide several different scratching and climbing areas.

TRAINING YOUR CAT TO SCRATCH THE POST

Cats mark their territory when they scratch; they usually release small amounts of oil or “scent” from glands located under each claw. Therefore, it is very important to teach your cat early on where he can and cannot scratch. Once an item is marked. The cat will prefer to return and scratch there again. If you train your cat to mark his scratching post and make it as inviting as possible, he will use it over and over again. Hiding treats, hanging toys at different levels, and generously spraying catnip on the post, are terrific ways to attract your cat as you frequently alternate goodies. When he scratches the post, make sure to give lots of praise and show excitement – your cat will love it and repeat his action.

If you’re initially having problems luring him away from furniture, there are some possible deterrents. Double-sided sticky tape placed on the corners of the furniture will discourage your cat to claw, as will simply placing a sheet over the furniture. Cats don’t generally like strong citrus smells, so if you spray orange air freshener in conjunction with using sticky tape, your cat may decide to stay away.

Making loud noises that your cat doesn’t associate with you also tends to work. Sounding a personal alarm when the cat claws the couch is a great way to make them believe their action is triggering the noise, not you.

If you’re not home to supervise, another suggestion involved placing the cat in a separate room, away from furniture, where he can’t do any damage. Sort of like a playpen for a child, only this one is for your cat! Don’t forget to leave

plenty of food, water, a clean litterbox, a scratching post and toys for your feline.

CLAW TRIMMING

Sharp claw tips can catch on furniture and cause it to tear. Keeping your cat’s claws blunt reduces this type of damage. Trim the claws every few weeks by using a nail clipper. Make sure that your vet or groomer gives you instructions for your first time – if you cut your cat’s “quick”, the pink part of the nail that has nerves and blood, you will hurt your cat and he will not want you to touch his claws again.

Most cats can learn to have their claw trimmed regularly without too much fuss, as long as you provide them with gentle handling and lots of special food treats as you trim.

Plastic nail clips, other wise known as Soft Paws, offer yet another alternative. They fit over your cat’s nails and are available only through your veterinarian.

RECOMMENDED READING

Cat Behavior and Training

Compiled by Lowell Ackerman, DVM
T.F.H. Publications, Inc. 1996

From the Cat’s Point of View

Gwen Bohenkamp,
Perfect Paws, Inc. 1991
Order direct: (415) 595-1962

Good Owners, Great Cats

Brian Kilcommons & Sarah Wilson,
Warner Books, 1995

If you have any question, problems or concerns please call the Humane Society Silicon Valley’s FREE Animal Behavior Helpline at (408) 727-3383, extension 753.