

DECLAWING

Why people declaw cats

People often mistakenly believe that declawing their cats is a harmless "quick fix" for unwanted scratching. They don't realize that declawing can make a cat less likely to use the litter box or more likely to bite.

People who are worried about being scratched, especially those with immune deficiency disorders, may be told incorrectly that their health will be protected by declawing their cats. However, declawing is not recommended by infectious disease specialists. The risk from scratches for these people is less than risks from bites, cat litter, or fleas.

Cats are usually about eight weeks old when they begin scratching. It's the ideal time to train kittens to use a scratching post and allow nail trims. Pet caregivers should not consider declawing a routine prevention for unwanted scratching. Declawing can actually lead to an entirely different set of behavior problems that may be worse than shredding the couch.

What is declawing?

Too often, people think that declawing is a simple surgery that removes a cat's nails---the equivalent of having your fingernails trimmed. Sadly, this is far from the truth.

Declawing traditionally involves the amputation of the last bone of each toe. If performed on a human, it would be like cutting off each finger at the last knuckle.

How is a cat declawed?

The standard method of declawing is amputating with a scalpel or guillotine clipper. The wounds are closed with stitches or surgical glue, and the feet are bandaged.

After effects

Medical drawbacks include pain, infection and tissue death, lameness, and back pain. Removing claws changes the way a cat's foot meets the ground and can cause pain similar to wearing an uncomfortable pair of shoes. There can also be a regrowth of improperly removed claws, nerve damage, and bone spurs.

For several days after surgery, shredded newspaper is typically used in the litter box to prevent litter from irritating declawed feet. This unfamiliar substitute, accompanied by pain when scratching in the box, may lead cats to stop using the litter box. Some cats may become biters because they no longer have their claws for defense.

What you can do

Scratching is normal cat behavior. It isn't done to destroy a favorite chair or to get even. Cats scratch to remove the dead husks from their claws, mark territory and stretch their muscles. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) opposes declawing except for the rare cases when it is necessary for medical purposes, such as the removal of cancerous nail bed tumor. Many countries feel so strongly about the issue that they have banned the procedure.

But you don't have to let your cat destroy your house. Here's what you can do:

- Keeps the claws trimmed
- Provide several stable scratching posts and boards around your home. Offer different materials like carpet, sisal, wood and cardboard, as well as different styles (vertical and horizontal). Use toys and catnip to entice your cat to use the posts and boards.
- Ask your veterinarian about soft plastic caps (such as Pet Paws) that are glued to the cat's nails. They need to be replaced about every six weeks.
- Use a special tape (such as Sticky Paws) on furniture to deter your cat from unwanted scratching (this tape is sticky on both sides and cats hate touching the sticky surface).

Unnecessary procedure

Declawing should be reserved only for those rare cases in which a cat has a medical problem that would warrant such surgery, such as the need to remove cancerous nail bed

tumors. Declawing does not guarantee that a cat will not be taken to a shelter if other problem behaviors occur, such as biting and not using the litter box.

Declawing is an unnecessary surgery which provides no medical benefit to the cat. Educated pet parents can easily train their cats to use their claws in a manner that allows everyone in the household to live together happily.

Source: Humane Society of The United States (HSUS)