

# Should Your Cat be Declawed?



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Many cat owners who genuinely love their pets have no idea what declawing means to their animals. Declawing means far more than leaving your pet defenseless against an attack outdoors.

## Declawing also means:

- The painful severing of ligaments and tendons. Declawing does not simply remove the claw —to be successful, the entire first joint of the cat's toes are completely amputated. (Imagine having the first joint of each of your own fingers amputated!)
- Altering your cat's sense of balance and ability to securely land on surfaces it has jumped up or down to, which can lead to injuries.
- Severely limiting your cat's ability to climb, which is both natural cat behavior and a means to escape predators.
- A potential change in personality and temperament. A declawed cat may become frightful and extremely defensive, and may overreact to stressful situations by growling or biting. Without the ability to swat, declawed cats are more likely to bite to when frustrated, overstimulated, etc.

## How important are a cat's claws?

Have you often wondered at a cat's remarkable grace and agility, its faultless sense of balance? To a great extent, this is due to its ingeniously designed retractable claws that allow it to establish footing for walking, running, springing, climbing and stretching.

## What happens to a cat when it is declawed?

First, it awakens from anesthesia, with its feet throbbing under the bandages; next it has pain, and then finds it has trouble walking. The physical effect of declawing is a gradual weakening of the muscles of the legs, shoulders and back. Balance is impaired. Emotionally, declawed cats frequently feel defenseless and thus live in a constant state of stress, making them more prone to disease.

Despite its grace, a cat is not sure-footed. Without the lightning-quick ability to grasp with its claws, it can easily be injured in a fall. Deprived of its claws, a cat may turn to its only other form of defense —its teeth. It is fairly common for a declawed cat to become a biter out of fear or frustration.

A declawed cat can also develop litter box issues. Tiny grains of litter or clay can irritate the declawed paw and cause the cat to not want to step foot in a litter box. Cats could then urinate or defecate in inappropriate areas such as on clothes or plastic bags.

## Take time to train your cat—

When your kitten starts to scratch furniture, gently pull it off and place its front paws on the scratching post. Keep the post in an easily accessible place so the cat becomes accustomed to using it. If an older cat persists in scratching your furniture, put the scratching post next to the furniture and make the furniture less attractive. There are number of products available that function like double stick tape but will not harm furniture.

Scratching is a tactile experience. Cats have definite preferences for both the surface they want to scratch on and whether that surface is horizontal or vertical. Cat also have preferred times to scratch, which can help you know where the place the scratching posts. If you cat scratches when it wakes up, put a scratching post next to a favorite sleeping spot. If your cat scratches to express excitement right after you get home from work, put a scratching post next the front door.

## Give your cat a manicure —

This is one of the easiest and most effective ways to eliminate problem scratching. It's best to start familiarizing your cat to nail trimming as a kitten, then to establish a regular routine so the cat accepts it as a part of everyday life. You may purchase special cat-claw scissors from a pet supply store or catalog, though a sharp pair of human nail-trimmers will work just as well on young kittens.



Veins (you can see the pink area)

Cut here.  
Only cut discolored area to avoid cutting into veins.



Hold your cat comfortably on your lap and give it a few minutes to relax. Press down on the top of each toe to extend the claw; look at the claw from the side to see the location of the pink veins inside so they may be avoided. Holding the paw firmly but gently, cut the claw at an angle, taking the sharp tip off of each nail. Work quickly and confidently so the procedure is over as soon as possible. Then reward your cat with lots of love and a special treat! If you do this on a weekly basis, your cat will quickly become accustomed to the procedure.

If you are uncomfortable trying this for the first time, ask your veterinarian or a professional groomer to show you how it's done.

## Provide your cat with its own furniture —

Although there are many choices available, an ideal cat scratching post should be rough and coarse. Cats love sisal rope scratching posts, which come in a variety of sizes, shapes and colors. You may wish to make your own scratching post by nailing a piece of 2 x 4 board securely to a wide base and covering it with a tightly-woven carpet remnant. A natural scratching post that cats love may be made from an untreated piece of tree branch or board angled against a wall and secured so it won't fall over.

## Additional solutions —

There are several other methods currently in use to reduce the problems associated with unwanted scratching, including "soft paw" nail caps. These colored, soft rubber claw covers may be quickly applied by your veterinarian, and can harmlessly prevent that cat from doing damage without painful surgery. The "Kitty Manicure" system is a peel-and-stick abrasive cat box liner that allows the cat to gently file down its own claws each time it uses the litter box. For more information on these solutions, ask our Adoption desk or call 520-327-6088 x173.