



## Declawing 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. Declawing can also cause lasting pain and physical problems for your cat.

Many countries have outlawed declawing. The Humane Society of United States opposes declawing except for the rare cases when it is necessary for medical purposes, such as the removal of cancerous nail-bed tumors.

People who are worried about being scratched, especially those with autoimmune deficiencies or bleeding disorders, may be told, incorrectly, that their health will be protected by declawing their cats.

### THE TRUTH ABOUT CATS & SCRATCHING

Scratching is normal cat behavior. It isn’t done to destroy a favorite chair or “get even.” Cats scratch in order to remove the dead husks from their claws, mark territory, and stretch their muscles. Cats are usually about eight (8) weeks old when they begin scratching. This is the ideal time to train kittens to use a scratching post and allow nail trims. Pet caregivers should never consider declawing as a routine prevention for unwanted scratching. Declawing can actually lead to an entirely different set of behavior problems that may be worse than shredding a 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 own fingernails trimmed. Sadly, this is far from the truth.

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

Declawing is an unnecessary surgery that 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.

### 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.

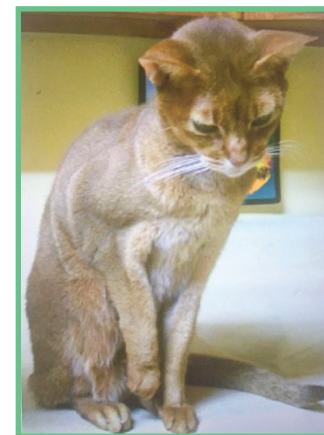
Another method is laser surgery in which a small, intense beam of light cuts through tissue by heating and vaporizing it. However, this still amounts to the amputation of the last toe bone, and carries with it the same long-term risks of lameness and behavioral problems associated with the removal of claws by using scalpel or clippers.

A third procedure is “tendonectomy,” in which the tendon that controls the claw in each toe is severed. The cat keeps their claws but can’t control or extend them. This procedure is associated with a high incidence of abnormally thick claw growth. Therefore more frequent and challenging nail trims are required to prevent the cat’s claws from growing into the cat’s paw pads. Because of complications, a cat that has had a tendonectomy often “requires” declawing later on.

### SOME NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF DECLAWING

Pain in the paw, infection, tissue necrosis (tissue death), lameness, and back pain are some of the drawbacks. Removing the claws changes the way a cat’s foot meets the ground, and can cause pain that is similar to wearing a very uncomfortable pair of shoes. Regrowth of improperly removed claws, nerve damage, and bone spurs may occur as well.

Several days after surgery, shredded newspaper is used in the litter box to prevent the litter from irritating the cat’s declawed feet. This unfamiliar litter substitute accompanied by pain, may lead cats to stop using the litter box. Some cats may become “biters” because they no longer have their claws for defense.



### TIPS TO STOP UNWANTED SCRATCHING IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR CAT DAMAGING YOUR HOME

Keep claws trimmed, and provide stable scratching posts and boards around your home. Offer different textures like carpet, sisal, wood, and cardboard as well as different styles (vertical/horizontal). Use toys and catnip to entice your cat to use the posts and boards.

Ask your veterinarian about soft plastic caps that fit over claws (they must be changed every six weeks). You can also attach a special tape (sticky paws) to furniture that deters cats from scratching it. \*It is undeniably inhumane to subject a cat to being declawed\*