

# Declawing: More than a Manicure

## Facts and Fiction about Declawing

### Why Do Cats Scratch?

Cats claw for several reasons

- To exercise and stretch their muscles
- To shed old claw tissues
- To alleviate boredom
- To mark territory
- For psychological comfort (through rhythmic action as well as the reassurance of self-defense)

### What You Need to Know

What does it mean when a cat is declawed? How is it done? The cat's claw is not a toenail at the end of the toe, it is movable digit attached to muscle as a finger might be. Strong ligaments and tendons attached to the digit give the cat the power to extend and retract the claws. This is unique in cats. Think of the cat as having 5 toes on each foot. Declawing is akin to cutting off half of each toe. When the end digit, including the claw is removed, the sensory and motor nerves are cut, damaged and destroyed.

*"The inhumanity of the procedure is clearly demonstrated by the nature of cats' recovery following the surgery. Unlike routine recoveries, including recovery from neutering surgeries, which are fairly peaceful, declawing surgery results in cats bouncing off the walls of the recovery cage because of excruciating pain. Cats that are more stoic huddle in the corner of the recovery cage, immobilized in a state of helplessness, from the overwhelming pain. Declawing fits the dictionary definition of mutilation to a tee. Even though analgesic drugs can be used postoperatively, ..their effects are incomplete and transient anyway, so sooner or later the pain will emerge." (Excerpted from *The Cat Who Cried For Help* by Dr. Nicholas Dodman).*

Most countries view declawing as an inhumane unnecessary procedure. The United States is the only country where declawing is legal on a routine basis.

**Declawing is unacceptable because the suffering and disfigurement it causes is not offset by any benefits to the cat. Declawing is done strictly to provide convenience for people.** [AVAR-The Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights].

Adopt A Stray is a not for profit 501(c)3 no kill, foster care program. We receive no government funding and rely solely on individual donations.

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### Alternatives to Declawing

Scratching is an essential part of normal cat behavior and providing a scratching surface that is more appealing than furniture is usually all that is needed to solve the problem.

### Provide an appropriate scratching surface

A good scratching post should be tall enough for your cat to fully stretch her body, usually at least 28 inches tall, and should be very stable. Some cats prefer horizontal scratching surfaces in addition to the post. Cats tend to like rough surfaces, scratching posts made from sisal are especially appealing. Put the post(s) where you and your cat spend the most time.

### Encourage your cat to use a scratching post

Make all associations with the post pleasurable. Feed her by the post, play with her around the post, rub some catnip on the post. Reward her with a treat when she uses it. Since cats like to scratch when they first wake up, place a scratching surface close to your cats favorite sleeping place.

### Discourage scratching inappropriate areas

Punishment doesn't work with cats and can make your cat fearful and insecure. One method that works consistently is to place 7 pennies in a soda can and securely seal the top. When your cat is scratching an inappropriate area, gently pick up the can (without rattling the pennies) and throw it about 5 feet away from the cat. The noise will distract your cat and she will learn very quickly this is not a good place to scratch. Covering areas where your cat wants to scratch with aluminum foil, bubble wrap, double sided tape or spraying the area with commercial deterrent sprays are also ways to make former scratching sites less agreeable.

### Trim your cats claws

Ask your veterinarian or an Adopt A Stray representative to show you how to correctly clip your cat's nails. Get your cat used to having her paws handled by gradually petting, holding and lightly massaging her toes as you give her affection. This will make nail trimming easier.

### Try Soft Paws

These are lightweight vinyl caps that you apply over your cat's own claws. You can find these at [www.softpaws.com](http://www.softpaws.com) or call 1-800-989-2542.

## Consequences of Declawing

The consequences of declawing are often pathetic. Some cats are so shocked by declawing that their personalities change. Cats deprived of this primary means of defense, may become nervous, fearful, and resort to their only remaining means of defense, biting. In some cases, when declawed cats use the litterbox their feet are so tender it hurts and this can result in a life-long aversion to using the litter box. Other declawed cats that can no longer mark with their claws, mark with urine resulting in inappropriate elimination problems and often, results in relinquishment of the cats to shelters and ultimately euthanasia. At ten years old 90% of all declawed cats develop spinal arthritis because they cannot properly stretch their spines without claws. Other seemingly unrelated physical ailments such as cystitis or skin disorders can also be manifestations of a cat's frustration and stress. These problems can develop at any point in the cats life.

## Points to Remember

- Don't declaw!**
- Understand your cats need to scratch**
- Forget punishment – it doesn't work.**
- Provide a suitable place for your cat to scratch**
- Make the scratching post attractive to kitty**
- Make the place she's been scratching unattractive – physical or scent related deterrents.**
- Trim your cat's claws regularly**
- Try Soft Paws®**  
These are light-weight vinyl caps that you apply over your cats claws. You can find these at [www.softpaws.com](http://www.softpaws.com) (1-800-989-2542)
- Whenever possible, start cats young**  
In addition to training your kitten to use a scratching post, also get your kitten used to having his paws touched and nails trimmed.

