

The Problems with Declawing



For many cat owners, their pet's natural impulse to scratch can become a problem, and declawing may seem a logical solution. However, declawing often creates more problems than it solves.

Physical Complications

First and foremost, declawing is a painful surgery that involves removing a cat's claws and the first digit of their toes. So immediately, there are potential negative complications from the surgery - such as an adverse reaction to the general anesthetic - or during the recovery, including infection, gangrene or hemorrhaging. Because of the pain and risk involved, we strongly advise against this unnecessary surgery.

Once a cat's claws have been removed, they can no longer perform their natural stretching and kneading rituals. They become weaker as they age and may experience debilitating arthritis in their backs and shoulders.

Behavioral Complications

A cat's claws are their main defense, and taking that away means they will more quickly resort to their second line of defense – biting.

Cats without claws also live in a constant state of stress from feeling less able to protect themselves or escape from dangerous situations. Because of this, declawed cats can become more reclusive and less friendly.

Lastly, but for many most importantly, a declawed cat can often stop using their litter box. Declawing can cause chronic pain to develop in a cat's paws, which can lead to cats who won't use the litter box due to the pain associated with scratching the litter. Many of these cats will seek a less painful, more inappropriate, place to eliminate, like carpet, the bathtub, the bed, or piles of laundry. Even though there are effective ways to modify a cat's litter box habits, it is a particularly difficult challenge with a declawed cat because the cat's aversion results from pain.

Teaching Appropriate Scratching

Scratching is a natural behavior and instinct for cats and can be directed to appropriate items, such as a cat scratching post. Instead of declawing, you can train your cat to scratch appropriate surfaces. See the handout 'Cats – Destructive Scratching' for tips on how to redirect the scratching onto acceptable objects.

Other Options

Consider other, less harmful, alternatives to declawing, including regular nail trimming, which you can learn to do at home, or vinyl nail caps, marketed under the names Soft Paws or Soft Claws.