



## **The Truth about Declawing Your Cat And Suggestions for Alternatives**

Cats like to scratch. They scratch during play. They scratch while stretching. They scratch to mark territory or as a threatening signal other cats. And because cats' claws need regular sharpening, cats scratch on things to remove frayed, worn outer claws and expose new, sharper claws. Unfortunately, all this scratching can cause a lot of damage to furniture, drapes and carpeting!

### **Should You Declaw Your Cat?**

Some people declaw their cats to prevent or resolve a scratching problem. The term "declaw" is a misnomer. It implies that declawing only involves the removal of a cat's claws. In reality, declawing involves amputating the end of a cat's toes. Cats suffer significant pain while recovering from declawing.

### **A Letter from a Veterinarian:**

First, you should know that declawing is pretty much an American thing; it's something people do for their own convenience without realizing what actually happens to their beloved cat. In England declawing is termed "inhumane" and "unnecessary mutilation." I agree. In many European countries it is illegal. I applaud their attitude.

Before you make the decision to declaw your cat, there are some important facts you should know:

1. Declawing is not like a manicure. It is serious surgery. Your cat's claw is not a toenail. It is actually closely adhered to the bone. So closely adhered that to remove the claw, the last bone of your cat's claw has to be removed.
2. Declawing is actually an amputation of the last joint of your cat's "toes". When you envision that, it becomes clear why declawing is not a humane act.
3. It is a painful surgery, with a painful recovery period. And remember that during the time of recuperation from the surgery your cat would still have to use its feet to walk, jump, and scratch in its litter box regardless of the pain it is experiencing. Wheelchairs and bedpans are not an option for a cat.

No cat lover would doubt that cats--whose senses are much keener than ours--suffer pain. They may, however, hide it better. Not only are they proud, they instinctively know that they are at risk when in a weakened position, and by nature will attempt to hide it. But make no mistake. This is not a surgery to be taken lightly.

Your cat's body is perfectly designed to give it the grace, agility and beauty that is unique to felines. Its claws are an important part of this design. Amputating the important part of their anatomy that contains the claws drastically alters the conformation of their

feet. The cat is also deprived of its primary means of defense, leaving it prey to predators if it ever escapes to the outdoors. I have also had people tell me that their cat's personality changed after being declawed.

Dr. Christianne Schelling, DVM

The Austin Humane Society discourages declawing because of the extreme pain that these surgeries inevitably cause.

### **Alternatives to Declawing:**

There are many solutions to problem cat scratching that do not involve declawing. Since declawing involves ten separate amputations of the distal phalanx, which is comparable to amputating the last joint of a human finger, alternatives to this drastic and painful procedure should be explored.

The best tactic when dealing with scratching is not to try to stop your cat from scratching, but instead to teach her where and what to scratch. An excellent approach is to provide her with appropriate, cat-attractive surfaces and objects to scratch, such as scratching posts.

### **Cat Scratching Posts**

Cats will always scratch, it is in their nature. The key is to provide your cat with a post that he/she prefers over your furniture. Provide a variety of scratching posts with different qualities and surfaces. Try giving your cat posts made of cardboard, carpeting, wood, sisal and upholstery. Some cats prefer horizontal posts. Others like vertical posts or slanted posts. Some prefer a vertical grain for raking, while others favor a horizontal grain for picking. Once you figure out your cat's preference for scratching, provide additional posts of that kind in various locations.

Keep in mind that all cats want a sturdy post that won't shift or collapse when used. Most cats also like a post that's tall enough that they can stretch fully. (This may be why cats seem to like drapes so much!) Encourage your cat to investigate her posts by scenting them with catnip, hanging toys on them and placing them in areas where she'll be inclined to climb on them. One of the reasons cats scratch is to mark their territory, so the post has to be in the places your cat likes to be.

### **Discourage inappropriate scratching by removing or covering other desirable objects.**

- Turn speakers toward the wall.
- Put plastic, double-sided sticky tape, sandpaper or upside-down vinyl carpet runner (knobby parts up) on furniture or on the floor where your cat would stand to scratch your furniture. Double-sided tape, such as "Paws Off!" is sticky on both sides. Simply apply it to the objects you would prefer your cat not scratch on, and his natural aversion to stickiness will put an end to the offending behavior. The tape works as an aversion tool, but you still need to provide a place for kitty to scratch -- such as a scratching post.
- Place scratching posts next to these objects, as "legal" alternatives.

## Other Alternatives

1. Consider putting plastic caps on your cat's claws (Soft Claws®) so that he'll do no damage if he scratches on something in your home. Developed by a veterinarian, Soft Paws are nail caps that look like a cat's nail, but are hollow inside.
  - a. The nail caps easily fit over the cat's nail and are secured with a safe, non-toxic adhesive.
  - b. Soft Paws effectively blunt the claws so that when a cat scratches, no damage occurs.
  - c. The nail caps stay on for about four to six weeks and fall off with the natural growth of the cat's nails.
  - d. Soft Paws should not be used on cats that go outside, since nail caps will impede a cat's defenses.
2. Scratching is one of the ways cat mark their territory. Not only does scratching provide a visual marking of the territory (the shredded material) but also, cats have scent glands on the bottom of their paw pads which deposit a scent discernible only by other cats. Spraying Feliway on objects you do not want your cat to scratch effectively eliminates this feel good pheromone so your cat doesn't feel the need to scratch the object.
3. Clip your cat's nails regularly.
4. If you catch your cat in the act of scratching an inappropriate object, you can try startling him by clapping your hands. Use this procedure only as a last resort, because your cat may associate you with the startling and learn to fear you.

## What NOT to Do

- Do not hold your cat by the scratching post and force her to drag her claws on it. This practice could seriously frighten your cat and teach her to avoid the scratching post completely. (She might decide to avoid you, too!)
- Do not throw away a favorite scratching post when it becomes unsightly. Cats prefer shredded and torn objects because they can really get their claws into the material. Used posts will also appeal to your cat because they smell and look familiar to her.