

Declawing

Declawing is a surgical procedure to remove the claws of a cat. It should be noted that declawing is not simply the removal of the claw. Since the claw is closely adhered to the bone, the last joint of the paw must be amputated in order to take off the claw. This is an extremely painful operation and precautions must be taken to minimize the amount of discomfort.

Declawing a cat should only be used as a last resort. All attempts to correct inappropriate scratching behavior should be exhausted before considering a declaw surgery.

If all attempts to change behavior have failed, it is recommended to perform surgery at 3 months of age. At this age there is less tissue to remove, and less bleeding and complications. Kittens and young cats recover faster than do older cats. We do not recommend declawing any cat over 1 year of age. Surgical declaw techniques and proficiencies can vary among veterinarians. If declawing is elected, it should be performed by a veterinarian who is experienced with the least traumatic techniques and is using the most up-to-date pain relief and medication, is comfortable and confident performing the procedure, and has a history of good results with minimal complications and short recovery periods. As with any surgical procedure, complications can occur but can be minimized by the use of proper surgical technique. Post-operative pain management is imperative.

Declawing decreases the cat's ability to defend itself. Therefore, declawed cats must be kept indoors. In some cases, a cat may have a tendency to bite more to compensate for the lack of claws. They may also be less likely to have good litter habits because their paws feel differently in the litter.

Scratching is a normal behavior for cats and they are not doing so to be destructive; they are simply following their natural instincts. While it is almost impossible to stop normal urges, it is possible to redirect it to appropriate places in the home.

There are 3 techniques to avoid inappropriate scratching: trim their nails (see the article "How to Trim Nails"), use non-surgical management by applying Soft Paws Nail Clips (a vinyl cap for nails), and discourage undesired scratching. To do this you must encourage your cat to scratch on appropriate objects and prevent your cat from using inappropriate objects by making them either unavailable or unappealing. See the article: "Destructive Scratching" for more information.

Helpful information can be found by asking your veterinarian. Make good and informed decisions for both you and your cat.