

To Declaw or Not Declaw

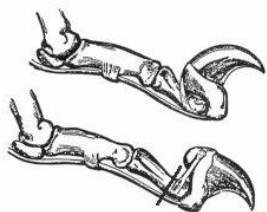
A cat extends its nails to claw, which is normal cat behavior, to remove dead husks from its claws, mark territory and stretch. Cats need to be provided a place to claw and can be trained to use the space.



Cat sleeps under anesthesia immediately after declawing operation.

A family adds a new kitty to the home and it starts scratching the furniture. Often the kitty ends up declawed on its front paws and sometimes on all four paws.

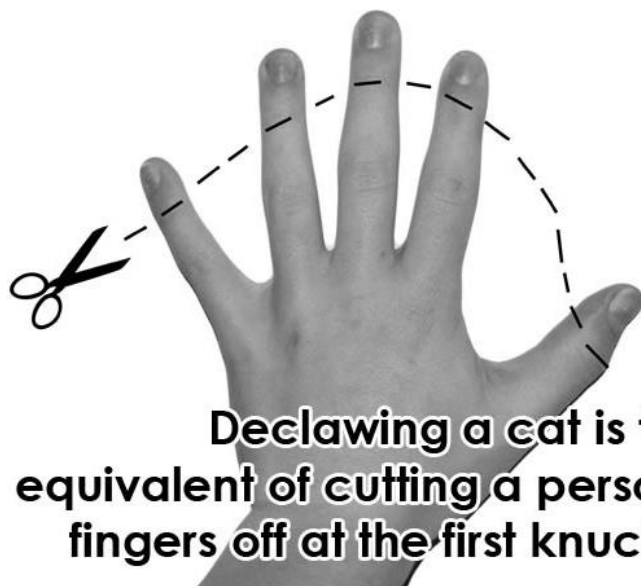
Cat Declaw (onychectomy) is a surgery that involves the amputation of 10 digits from the forepaws. The surgery results in removal of bones, tendons, ligaments and claws to the first knuckle of each toe. Complications may include nerve damage, scar tissue formation, arthritis, bone chips and abnormal regrowth of nail.



This drawing of a cat claw shows the mechanism for extending it. Declawing removes the claw immediately above the "extending mechanism." The joint and underlying tendon are cut off.

Declawing is a painful surgery, with a painful recovery period. During the recuperation time, a kitty still has to use its feet to walk, jump, and scratch in its litter box regardless of the pain it is experiencing. Litter box issues often occur after declawing. Declawed cats may also become depressed, reclusive, withdrawn, irritable, aggressive and unpredictable. In addition, changes in behavior can occur. Balance is also affected by a cat's inability to grasp with its claws.

A declawed cat frequently resorts to biting when confronted with even minor threats. Biting becomes an overcompensation for the insecurity of having no claws.



Declawing a cat is the equivalent of cutting a person's fingers off at the first knuckle.

A declawed cat can learn to use its teeth more when grooming and often chews an irritation rather than scratching it. Chronic physical ailments such as cystitis or skin disorders can be signs of a declawed cat's frustration and stress.

Alternatives to Declawing

A tall, sturdy, heavy scratching post sprinkled occasionally with catnip usually works. Some cats are partial to sisal doormats. Regular nail trimming, training cats to use cardboard scratchers or emery scratching pads that dull the claws, rotary sanding devices such as Pedi-Paws, covering furniture or using double-sided sticky tape or sheets such as Sticky Paws are other options.

Another alternative is the application of vinyl nail caps that are affixed to the claws with nontoxic glue and require periodic replacement when the cat sheds its claw sheaths.

Declawing is legal in most US jurisdictions. The procedure, however, was outlawed in 2003 in West Hollywood, California, the first such ban in the US. In 2009, seven other California cities passed ordinances banning declawing on the basis of animal cruelty. The two leading national animal protection organizations in the US, the Humane Society of the United States and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, strongly discourage or condemn the procedure. Declawing is uncommon outside North America. Many European countries (including the United Kingdom and Germany) prohibit or significantly restrict the practice, as do Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Turkey and others.

Cat owners should be advised by their veterinarian on the pros and cons of declawing and the risk of the surgery before making any decision.