

DECLAWING: DON'T DO IT. HERE'S WHY.



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Declawing a cat is more than removal of the cat's nail. Cats' claws are part of their toe bones. The procedure known as "declawing" is the surgical removal of the entire end of the cat's toe, chopping off the bone and cutting through the attaching ligaments and tendon. A more accurate term would be "deknuckling." The declawing operation itself is the human equivalent of removing the first joint of all your fingers.

Cats use their claws to exercise, play, stretch, climb, hunt and mark their territory. Declawing is neither an effective nor a compassionate way to deal with a cat's unwanted scratching. Although your cat might use your hands or furniture for these activities, there are many other ways to guide your cat to healthy claw activity!

Declawing is never the answer for anything.

Veterinary experts report that the lack of these joints impairs the cat's balance and can cause weakness from muscular disease. Declawing also makes a cat feel defenseless and can affect their personality, making them skittish or nervous biters. In rescue work, we see many declawed cats that have been given up by their owners because the cats still had behavioral problems that were made worse by not having their claws

Declawing is never the answer for anything. Take it from an expert, Dr. Nicholas Dodman, author of *The Cat Who Cried For Help*, who offers this perspective on the procedure:

“Declawing involves more than simply trimming a cat's nails to the quick; it actually involves amputation of the tips of the digits, bones and all. The inhumanity of the procedure is clearly demonstrated by the nature of cats' recovery from anesthesia 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, presumably by the overwhelming pain. Declawing fits the dictionary definition of mutilation to a tee. Words such as deform, disfigure, disjoint, and dismember all apply to this surgery. Partial digital amputation is so horrible that it has been employed for torture of prisoners of war, and in veterinary medicine, the clinical procedure serve as a model of severe pain for testing the efficacy of analgesic drugs. Even though analgesic drugs can be used postoperatively, they rarely are, and their effects are incomplete and transient anyway, so sooner or later the pain will emerge.”

Is Laser Declaw Really a More Humane Option?

Q: I was told that it is possible to humanely declaw cats with a laser. My two kittens are dangerous with their claws. What can I do? C. S., Cyberspace

A: Dangerous kittens? Really? No offense, but I'm unsure how kittens might be perceived as dangerous. It's true that kitten nails can be sharp, especially when they get too long. A veterinary technician or a veterinarian can show you how to clip those nails about once a week. And when taught at a young age that nail clipping is associated with food and/or play, the experience isn't a bad one. The process takes less than five minutes.

Any declaw surgery (*onychectomy*) is the amputation of a cat's toes – cutting them off at the equivalent of the first knuckle on a human finger, even when a laser is used.

“Unfortunately, declawing with a laser poses its own problems,” explains feline veterinarian Dr. Margie Scherk, editor of *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*. “Not only can the laser burn the end of the bone lead to inflammation and pain, but even with laser, bone fragments can (be left) behind. This may cause chronic pain in the feet, but also in the back and other joints if the cat tries to walk in a way to reduce pressure on the hurting bits.”

Scherk advocates clipping those nails more often. Begin by training kitties to have their paws handled. Just play with their paws and gently press down on them to extrude the nails during cuddle time. Scherk suggest not doing this when kittens are playful. Begin by offering lots of favorite treats, but in time you can cut back on those.

She adds, “If your cats are really wiggly, you can wrap them in a towel to help keep them and their feet from going in different directions. I like to sit on the floor or a chair with my cat on my lap.”

Scherk, who is in Vancouver, British Columbia Canada, says “If you still want more protection ask your vet or groomer to show you how to apply SoftPaws, vinyl nail caps that you change every four to six weeks.” (SoftPaws are available at most places where pet products are sold).

Scherk feels strongly about this topic, and I agree. “There really is no way we can justify amputating someone else’s fingers and toes for our safety or property. Who gives us the right?”

There are much better — and more effective — alternatives to declawing.

Exercise and play with your cat regularly. Give him or her a scratching post or a corrugated cardboard scratcher to use. Trim your cat’s nails on a regular basis. And, of course, talk to your vet or cat-owner friends about ways to “train” your cat to exercise its natural instincts in non-destructive ways. A squirt bottle is a great way to teach a cat not to scratch on particular surfaces. It doesn’t hurt them and if you are persistent, they will get the message. There is also a product called Soft Paws. This is a fake nail which is not sharp at the tip, which fits over your cats claws. It is sold in pet stores and veterinarian clinics.

Lastly, declawing cats is illegal in many parts of the U.S., including:

- Beverly Hills
- Burbank
- Culver City
- Los Angeles
- Santa Monica
- West Hollywood

If you are adamant about having a kitty without claws, we strongly urge you to consider adopting a previously-declawed kitty. Contact us and we can help you.