

# Before You Declaw Your Cat

If you're thinking about declawing your cat, there's a lot for you to consider first. There are plenty of better, safer, more ethical options to deal with inappropriate scratching, including teaching your cat where it's appropriate to scratch, trimming your cat's nails, or applying caps to their claws.

Cat declawing is illegal in many countries and some U.S. states. Many veterinarians will refuse to perform this surgery. We do NOT declaw cats at the SPCA of Texas.

## Medical and Ethical Consequences

Removing a cat's claws isn't like having their nails trimmed; it's serious surgery involving amputation of the last bone in each of your cat's toes. Cat toes are tactile and necessary for their everyday activities. A comparable surgery would be the amputation of the tips of your fingers and toes past the last joint. How would you feel if the ability to type, write, eat, walk, jump, or balance was impeded unnecessarily?

Even done properly, the surgery can result in infection, back pain, tissue necrosis, lameness, nerve damage, bone spurs, and other issues. The recovery period is painful, and your cat will need to walk, jump, and scratch in their litter box during that period. As the area is so delicate and so frequently used, even something as simple as leaping off the bed or couch can open the wounds on their toes and cause bleeding. The discomfort they experience can change their litter box habits -- they may begin to associate their box with the pain in their toes, which may lead to not using the litter box some or most of the time.

## Behavioral Consequences

Cats use their claws for more than scratching to mark their territory and kneading to show their contentment: they need them for balance, for jumping and climbing, and for defense. A cat without claws is at the mercy of any predators they encounter. If you allow your cat outdoors or your cat gets out, this vulnerability could kill them. Some cats, having lost their claws as a means of defense, resort more quickly to biting when they feel threatened or anxious.

## Alternatives to Declawing

To prevent damage to your possessions while you teach your cat to scratch in the right places, you can easily trim your cat's claws every two weeks; if you don't know how, ask your veterinarian or groomer to show you.

You can also use Soft Paws, soft caps that you can apply about every four to six weeks to your cat's claws.

You may also consider using Feliway products to encourage your cat to scratch on appropriate items. Feliway simulates feline facial pheromones and sends a message to your cat that the spaces where it is used are safe places for your cat. It comes in a spray as well as a plug-in diffuser. You can use the spray on vertical surfaces of your cat tree or scratching posts. Feliway comes in two different formulas; one for single cats and one for multi-cat households and, most recently, a FeliScratch formula made especially for cat scratchers. It doesn't work with all cats, but many cat owners report excellent results. Look for suppliers online, check with your local pet store, or with your vet.

Please see our handout on "Cats and Scratching" for more detailed information on getting your cat to scratch where you want them to.