

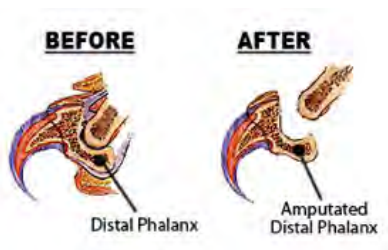


# PAWS<sup>®</sup> CHICAGO

## DECLAWING

**Declawing, or onychectomy, is an elective surgery that results in the amputation of a cat's third phalanges.**

Surgical amputation of the third phalanges is comparable to removing the bones closest to the fingertips in humans. It is an irreversible procedure, and the decision to declaw your cat should only be made after careful consideration of its risks, benefits, and potentially adverse outcomes.



Declawing a cat is the equivalent of amputating a human's fingers at the knuckles closest to the fingertips.

## Why Declaw?

Within the veterinary and animal welfare communities, there is disagreement regarding the merits of declawing. Some animal care professionals feel the procedure should not be performed under any circumstances. Others feel it is an acceptable alternative to relinquishment or euthanasia if destructive scratching cannot be managed in the home, or if scratching compromises the health and safety of humans in the home.



The American Veterinary Medical Association's current position on declawing states "that the procedure only be performed after exhausting other methods of controlling scratching behavior or if it has been determined that the cat's claws present a human health risk."<sup>1</sup>

## Potential Consequences of Declawing

Although many people report successful outcomes following their cat's declawing, cat owners should be aware of the physical and behavioral consequences reported by others following declaw procedures:

**Post-Operative Complications Following Declaw Surgery:** hemorrhage (bleeding), claw regrowth, wound dehiscence (reopening of surgical incision), infection, and/or pain (both acute and chronic)

**Long-term Behavioral and Physical Complications Following Declaw Surgery:** inappropriate elimination/litter box avoidance, increased aggression and/or biting, overgrooming, and/or chronic back pain



A 2017 study published in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* found that "declawing increases the risk of long-term or persistent pain, manifesting in unwanted behaviors such as inappropriate elimination (soiling/urinating outside the litter box) and aggression/biting."<sup>2</sup>

# Factors to Consider if Choosing to Declaw Your Cat

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If you are unable to manage destructive scratching in the home or need to declaw your cat due to medical or safety concerns, we recommend adhering to the following guidelines to increase your cat's chances of a successful outcome.

**Age:** Cats under the age of one year may experience fewer post-operative complications, as well shorter recovery times than cats who are declawed as adults.

**Surgical Technique:** Some studies have shown that performing declaws with a surgical laser, as opposed to a scalpel blade or guillotine nail trimmers, results in fewer post-operative complications.

**Indoor/Outdoor Access:** If your cat is declawed, do not allow him or her to have outdoor access. Declawing may affect your cat's ability to defend itself from outside predators.

## Alternatives to Declawing

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If you are considering declawing in order to prevent destructive scratching in the home, you may wish to explore other ways of managing scratching before committing to the surgical procedure.



### Scratching Posts

Many cats like vertical scratching posts. Make sure the post is tall enough to allow your cat to fully stretch his body and legs. The post should also be stable enough to prevent wobbling.

Some cats prefer slanted or horizontal scratchers. Offer a variety to see what your cat likes best.

Use a toy or catnip to attract your cat to an appropriate scratcher. Reward your cat with treats and verbal praise whenever he uses his scratcher.

Finding your cat's preferred surface may require experimentation. Scratchers made from cardboard, wood, carpet, or sisal are favored by many cats.



### Nail Trims

Weekly nail trims can minimize damage to your furniture.

Your veterinarian can show you the proper way to trim your cat's nails. Most veterinary clinics will clip your cat's nails for a reasonable fee if you are unable to do so yourself.



### Soft Paws

Soft Paws are plastic nail covers for your cat. They are easy to apply, and typically need to be replaced every 4-6 weeks. If you cannot apply them yourself, contact your veterinarian. Many vet clinics will apply Soft Paws to your cat's nails for a reasonable fee.

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### References

1. The American Veterinary Medical Association Animal Welfare Division. (2016, February 16). Welfare implications of declawing of domestic cats literature review. Retrieved from <https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/LiteratureReviews/Pages/Welfare-Implications-of-Declawing-of-Domestic-Cats-Backgrounder.aspx>
2. Science Daily. (2017, May 23). Declawing linked to aggression and other abnormal behavior in cats. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/05/170523124130.htm>