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Cat Declaw Surgery Information and Alternatives to Declawing

Scratching Is A Normal Behavior In Cats

Feline scratching is a frequent behavioral "issue" in many households. However, when the cat has the urge to scratch and if the cat can't scratch an outdoor object, he/she will choose an indoor objects, such as furniture. When the problem becomes intolerable, or even before, some cat owners opt for procedures, such as declawing.

Cats scratch to:

- 1) remove the sheaths from their claws (i.e. grooming behavior)
- 2) to delineate territory...(i.e.a marking behavior ...via providing olfactory (secretion from glands in pads).

It is important to understand that this is an innate social behavior...not a learned one. As such it can be difficult, but is not impossible, to modify.

The purpose of the following information is to show you what a declaw surgery is and to show you alternatives to surgical declawing.

What Is A Declaw Surgery?

Declawing of cats is an elective surgical procedure which does not have any medical benefit to the patient. The procedure not only involves removal of the nail, but also involves removal of the bone associated with that nail and cutting of tendons associated with that bone. Being a surgical procedure, there is pain associated with it and there are some inherent risks associated with general anesthesia. Declawing should be considered to be a last resort to cat owners.

How We Perform Our Declaw Procedures

Gas Anesthesia

We use isoflurane gas anesthesia and oxygen. Not all veterinarians use it, but we feel that it is the safest available today and it is the same anesthetic used on humans.

Laser Declaw Only

Because we want to make your cat as comfortable as possible, we perform declaw surgery exclusively with a laser at our hospital. The paws will be much less swollen which means less pain, and a much speedier recovery time. We have been so impressed by the advantages laser surgery provides that we have stopped performing cat declaw surgery with a scalpel blade altogether. Although laser surgery requires a larger investment, we feel that it is by far the best option for cat declaw surgery.

Laser surgery will decrease surgical pain experienced by your cat but will not eliminate it. Even if performed with a laser, the declaw procedure should be considered to be an elective, potentially painful surgical procedure.

Surgical Monitoring

Your cat would have a heart & lung monitor on during the surgery as a safety precaution as well. This way we are able to tell if the heart is going too fast or too slow so that we can adjust your pet to the ideal level of anesthesia.

We would have a certified veterinary technician available at all times to help the doctor monitor the anesthesia as well.

Postoperative Care Included

We also include a free two night stay for our declaw patients. We feel that they really need that extra two night's rest because it allows the paws to heal, significantly reducing complications.

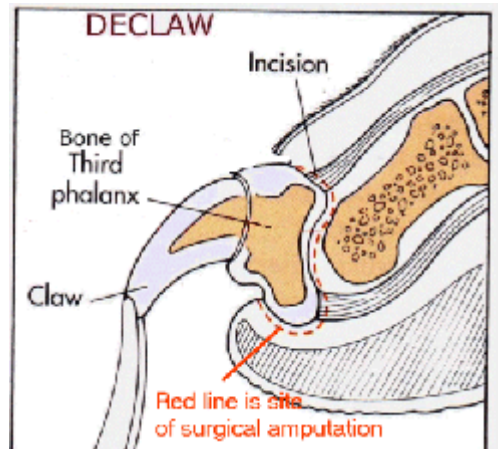
Medical Progress Examinations Included

And if your pet were to need any medical progress (recheck) examinations following surgery it would be at no charge to you.

Alternatives to Declawing

When you first get a new kitten or cat, there are all sorts of things that come to mind as "must do's." Find the perfect spot for the litter box. See a veterinarian for that all-important new pet exam, get all of the shots up to date, and have your new cat spayed or neutered. But is having your cat declawed a "must do?" No, it is not.

While declawing a cat that is destructive to furniture and carpeting is sometimes necessary, it is best to first try giving your cat acceptable alternatives for scratching.



First, it is most humane to accept that claws and scratching are inherent feline attributes, and that cat owner's should try to adjust one's life accordingly if a cat is desired as a companion. If this is unacceptable, then perhaps a different companion would be in order. This is something to seriously consider.

If however, as you most likely are at this point, a cat owner and you also want to protect your furniture, then we encourage you to consider these alternatives before choosing to declaw your cat.

Use a Scratching Post

Here are some of the keys to teaching your cat to love its scratching post.

Sturdy – Scratching is a way cats get a good stretch. They do not like surfaces that wobble or move away from them when they are scratching. Posts that hang from doorknobs usually do not work well. Test a scratching post yourself by pushing it – it should not move.

Tall – Stretching again: cats love to stretch out to their full length when they scratch. The taller the better, but 3 feet should do. If your cat has already been scratching on your furniture, make sure the post is at least as tall as that favorite scratching spot.

Surface- Cats like to pull downward when they scratch, so a material with a vertical grain works best. Carpet covered posts are very popular and the sisal covered ones also go over very well with the feline crowd. Cardboard and wood are also good for some cats. If your cat has already shown a preference for a softer or harder material, try to find something similar in a post. Some of the best scratching posts are homemade, based on the individual cat's tastes.

Location – The location of the scratching post is probably the most important factor. Your cat likes to spend time with you and your family and is not going to walk down to the basement for an after- nap stretch and scratch, especially with that tempting couch right there. Scratching is also a marking behavior for territory. There are glands on the toe pads that secrete substances that only cats can smell. Your cat is going to want to scratch someplace that is important to him so he can "lay claim to his territory". Living rooms and family rooms are the best places for scratching posts. If your cat already has a problem with scratching on furniture, put the post as close as possible to that spot. Place the post in a prominent location in the room, usually towards the center. Place the post just a little farther towards the center of the room than is the end of the piece of furniture that is getting scratched. Once he starts to use the post regularly you can slowly move it away.

The best thing to do is to have the scratching post before you bring home your new cat or kitten so that there is an acceptable outlet for scratching from the start. Scent it with catnip and hang dangling toys from it (many come with toys already attached) to entice him. Praise your cat when he scratches the post.

Discourage Certain Behaviors

To keep your cat off what you do not want scratched, try changing the texture of the item, such as placing a sheet over the sofa or using aluminum foil or double sided tape on the object. You may also be able to discourage her or him by using a scent which cats generally do not like, but which is not unpleasant for human beings. One which may work is the fresh smell of citrus.

Do not underestimate the power of praise. When your cat scratches on his post, leap at the opportunity to tell him just how *purrrr*-fect he is. Treats can be very useful to encourage repeating a behavior such as scratching on his post.

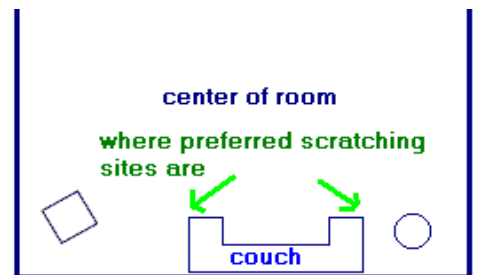
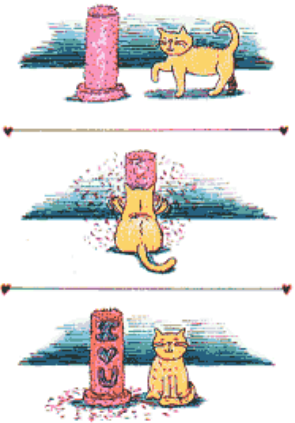
Trimming Nails

Keeping a cat's nails trimmed is another alternative to declawing. Cat owners can lessen the amount of husk-removal scratching their cats engage in by seeing that the claws are clipped regularly. The tip of the claw should be removed along with any loose husk covering the fresh, sharper claw underneath. If their claws are clipped as needed, once every week or two, cats will have less desire to remove the husks of dead claws by scratching - an activity frequently mistaken for sharpening the claws.

Nail Caps

There are commercial products which cover the claws and reduce the need for frequent trimming of the nails. An adhesive is used to attach a plastic cap over each claw. These are alleged to last up to 6 weeks and claim not to be harmful if eaten by the cat.

If you feel you have tried the above recommendations but your cat is still scratching your furniture, then as a last resort, we recommend surgical removal of the claws.



Some helpful web sites:

The Sisal Cat Scratching Post: <http://www.purrrfectpost.com/>

Soft Paws Nail Caps: <http://www.softpaws.com/>