

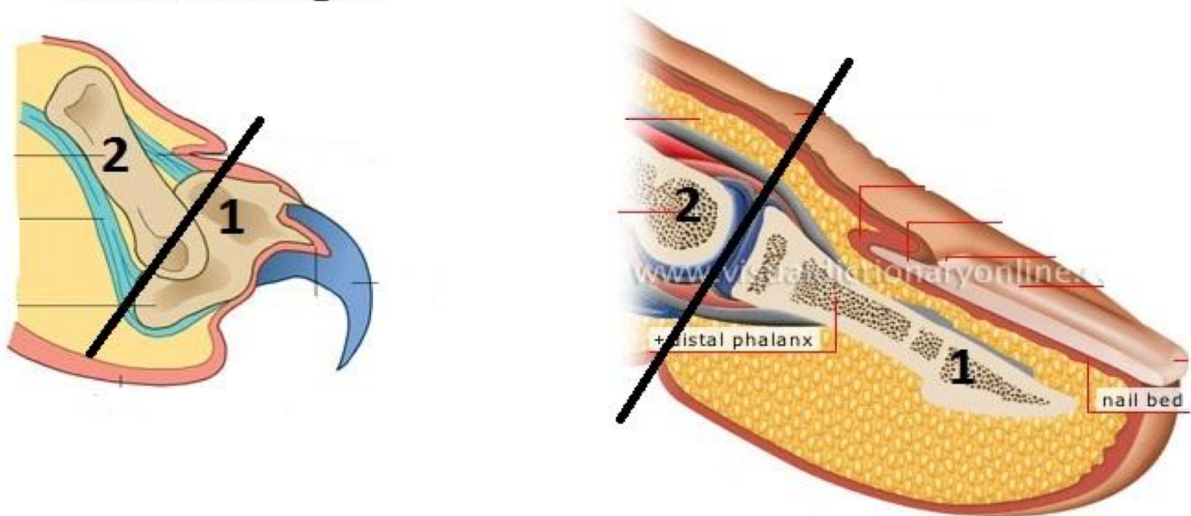
Cats and Claws

After learning that declawing is not only a painful procedure for your cat, but actually removes a needed body part, most cat owners opt for alternatives to declawing. The information that follows explains the declawing procedure and provides suggestions for you to use so that you can live happily with your cat, claws and all!

The Declawing Procedure

The standard way to declaw a cat is to remove not only the claw, but the cells at the base of the claw, and part or all of the terminal bone of the toe. Consider it an amputation of part of the cat's body. To better understand this, think of it as removing the last part of your finger, all the way up to the joint closest to your fingernail!

What declawing actually is compared to a human finger



Although it is done under anesthesia, after surgery, most cats act as if they are in great discomfort. The cat's feet are tightly bandaged after surgery and the cat will experience throbbing. Once the bandages are removed, the feet will be painful to walk on. In addition, there is always some risk associated with anesthesia; there may be additional risks associated with infection or blood loss.

All declawed cats should remain indoors 100% of the time, as they have limited ability to climb to safety or defend themselves outdoors.

Alternatives to Declawing

You can keep both a cat with claws and unclawed furniture in your home! Understanding your cat's needs will help you to supply the correct materials and training to make this situation possible.

Remember, scratching and stretching are a natural part of being a cat. Endorphins are released when a cat scratches. You should not punish your cat for the natural act of scratching, but instead provide your cat with an acceptable place to scratch.

Purchase a sturdy scratching post, climbing furniture, or build your own using sisal, wood, and carpet scraps. Make sure the post is secure so that if the cat lunges at it with all its force, the post won't topple over.

Some folks prefer to get a chunk of log for their cats to scratch – many cats love this since it feels like scratching on a tree! Logs can be scavenged or purchased at your local building supply store. Again, make sure you can secure the log upright.

Even if you only have one cat in your house, be sure to provide several different scratching posts.

Training Your Cat to Scratch the Post

Cats mark their territory when they scratch; they usually release small amounts of oil or "scent" from glands located under each claw. Therefore, it is very important to teach your cat early on where they can and cannot scratch. Once an item is marked, the cat will prefer to return and scratch there again. If you train your cat to mark their scratching post and make it as inviting as possible, they will use it over and over.

Hiding treats, hanging toys at different levels, and generously spraying catnip on the post, are terrific ways to attract your cat as you frequently alternate goodies. When they scratch the post, make sure to give lots of praise and show excitement – your cat will love it and repeat their actions.

If you're initially having problems luring them away from furniture, there are deterrents. Double-sided sticky tape placed on corners of furniture will discourage your cat from clawing, as will simply placing a sheet over the furniture. Cats don't generally like strong citrus smells, so if you spray orange air freshener in conjunction with using sticky tape, your cat may decide to stay away.

Making loud noises that your cat doesn't associate with you, also tends to work. Sounding a personal alarm when the cat claws the couch is a great way to make them believe their action is triggering the noise, not you.

If you're not home to supervise, another suggestion involves placing the cat in a separate room, away from furniture, where they can't do any damage. Sort of like a playpen for a child, only this one is for your cat! Don't forget to leave plenty of food, water, a clean litter box, a scratching post and toys, for your feline.

Claw Trimming

Sharp claw tips can catch on furniture and cause it to tear. Keeping your cat's claws blunt reduces this type of damage. Trim the claws every few weeks by using a nail clipper. Make sure that your vet or groomer gives you instructions for your first time - if you cut the cat's quick, the pink part of the nail that has nerves and blood, it will be painful for your cat and they will not want you to touch their nails again.

Most cats can learn to have their claws trimmed regularly without too much fuss, as long as you provide them with gentle handling and lots of special food treats as you trim. Plastic nail clips, otherwise known as toe caps (e.g., Soft Paws™, Soft Claws™, Cozy Claws™, Kitty Claws™, etc.), offer yet another alternative. They fit over your cat's nails and are available through your veterinarian or local pet supply store.

Recommended Reading

- Cat Behavior and Training, compiled by Lowell Ackerman, DVM, T.F.H. Publications, Inc. 1996.
- From the Cat's Point of View, by Gwen Bohenkamp, Perfect Paws, Inc. 1991.
- Good Owners, Great Cats, by Brian Kilcommons & Sarah Wilson, Warner Books, 1995.