



Declawing Take Your Cat's Side

Few issues divide the opinions of cat owners more than declawing. Most people know a family member, friend or co-worker who has declawed their cat to save their living room sofa from being damaged. Is surgical amputation that has no therapeutic benefit to an animal justifiable on the grounds of preventing damage to inanimate material possessions? The Nova Scotia SPCA, and animal welfare organizations around the world, say **no**.

Declawing is an extreme approach to dealing with a common feline behaviour. The Nova Scotia SPCA opposes altering animals for non-medical purposes, but recognizes and accepts that surgical alterations may be necessary if it is the only alternative to euthanasia, a position that is shared by the Canadian Federation of Human Societies. In several countries, declawing of cats is banned under animal cruelty laws.

When a cat is declawed, it is not simply their claws that are removed, but the entire first joint of their toes to which the claws are attached, including bones and soft tissue. This is similar to amputating the first joint of a human's fingers and toes. However, the result is even worse for a cat because they rely on all ten tips of their toes for balance when walking. The pain and discomfort felt by declawed cats following surgery, and possibly lasting for the rest of their lives, may bring about undesirable behavioural changes. A cat may stop using their litter box because it is uncomfortable or painful to dig. A once friendly cat may start biting during play or interaction because they are unable to comfortably swipe or use their claws. Declawing cats also limits their ability to defend themselves during confrontations.

There are many alternatives to declawing that will save your cat from unnecessary, life-altering, painful surgery.

Provide your cat with scratching posts or scratching boxes as a safe way for them to find relief. A good scratching post is sturdy, with a heavily weighted bottom, and tall enough that an adult cat can reach up to scratch. Scratch boxes rest horizontally on the floor and are often made of corrugated cardboard. Encourage your cat to use a scratch post or box by playing with them around it or using catnip to attract them to it. Use positive reinforcement, such as praise and treats, when your cat uses the scratch post or box. Do not drag your cat's paws across the post or box to teach her how to use it as this may discourage them.

If your cat still prefers your sofa over the scratch post or box you have provided, you can deter them from scratching by placing tinfoil or double-sided tape over the spots they scratch. Most pet supply stores carry products that help deter cats from furniture, such as sprays that give off a smell cats do not like.

Another option is Soft Paws nail caps, which are made of non-toxic rubber and slide over your cat's claws, held in place by adhesive. The nail caps create a blunt end for your cat's claws. Soft Paws will stay in place for 4-6 weeks. They are available at pet supply stores, veterinary offices and online at www.softpaws.com.

Regular nail clipping should also become part of your routine with your cat. A cat's claws should be trimmed every couple of weeks using special clippers that are available at pet supply stores and veterinary offices. Read the instructions and be careful not to trim past what is called the "quick," the solid-coloured part of the claw containing blood vessels and nerve endings. It may take some time for your new kitten or adult cat to get used to you trimming their nails, so be patient and reward them for cooperation and good behaviour.

Reward yourself as well: by saying no to declawing, you are a responsible cat owner who has done what is best for your feline companion.