
The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the ASPCA's Bergh Memorial Hospital encourage owners to seek alternatives to declawing their cats. If you are thinking about having your pet declawed, please take a moment to consider the following information.

Claws Are Important to a Cat

A cat's remarkable grace and agility and its faultless sense of balance are due to a great extent to its retractable claws, which allow it to establish footing for walking, running, springing, climbing, or stretching. A cat's claws are also its best defense mechanism.

The Need to Scratch

When a cat scratches, it pulls off the old outer nail sheath and exposes sharp, smooth claws. Scratching is also a way of fulfilling the cat's strong instinctive need to mark its territory. Not only does a cat mark an object visibly by scratching it, but the scratching deposits secretions from glands in the feet that can be smelled by other cats. Scratching may also serve psychological and physiological needs by providing comfort and expression by kneading and allowing valuable stretching and foot-muscle exercise.

Declawing Operation

The standard declawing procedure calls for the removal of the claw, and the last bone of the toe. The operation is usually performed on the front feet. It is actually an amputation comparable to the removal of the fingers of the human hand at the last knuckle. The cat experiences considerable pain in the recovery and healing process.

THE RISKS

Medical: As with any surgical procedure that requires general anesthesia there are risks. Complications from anesthesia and/or the surgical procedure are possible. The use of advanced anesthetics, proper monitoring of the anesthetized patient and surgery performed by a qualified veterinarian should limit the risks substantially.

Behavioral: No definitive studies have been conducted on the behavioral effects of declawing. However, some owners and veterinarians have noticed personality changes in declawed cats. These people report that formerly lively, friendly animals have become withdrawn and introverted. Or, deprived of their primary form of defense, they become nervous, fearful, or aggressive. The stress caused by feeling defenseless may make some declawed cats more prone to disease or to inappropriate elimination outside the litterbox.

Safety: A declawed cat must never be allowed outdoors; its ability to defend itself or escape from danger has been seriously impaired. Even indoors, a cat without claws faces dangers. One physical effect of declawing is a gradual weakening of the muscles of the legs, shoulders and back; balance is impaired. This, combined with the fact that despite its grace, a cat's surefootedness depends on its ability to grasp quickly with its claws, means that a declawed animal can more easily be injured in a fall.

INSTEAD OF DECLAWING

See our [Trimming Cats Claws and Managing Scratching](#) handouts.

Adopt a Declawed Cat

Another alternative is to adopt a cat that is already declawed. For many reasons, declawed cats can end up at the Humane Society of Huron Valley shelter and are also in need of a loving home.

Is Your Cat Scratching You?

It is not uncommon to get scratched by your kitten or adolescent cat. It is during these growth stages that predatory play is at its highest. To avoid being seen as "prey" by your cat, direct play onto such interactive toys. See our [Cat Toys and Rough Kitten Play](#) handouts.

HSHV does not support declawing because it is a painful elective surgery that often causes long-term problems and leaves your beloved pet defenseless for life. Though it is still promoted by some private veterinary practices, it is now banned in several countries and areas of the United States. Cats have a natural, instinctual need to scratch. Just like destructive chewing in puppies, scratching is a behavior that needs to be managed through positive alternatives and training methods. Finding acceptable ways for your cat to scratch is easier and cheaper than many think and is a part of owning a feline. Ask us how. We are here to help!

If you have questions about declawing or about training your cat, don't hesitate to call us. **Our Behavior Helpline is always available to adopters at 734-662-5545.** We'll do our best to help you establish and maintain a happy relationship with your feline friend, while keeping both your furnishings and your pet in one piece.

Revised by the ASPCA's Companion Animal Services from materials provided by the MSPCA.

Adapted by HSHV