



Why you should NOT declaw your cat

WHAT IS DECLAWING?

Declawing is the surgical removal of a cat's claws. It is normally done on the front feet only. The surgery involves removing the last bone of the cat's toe, and IS THE SAME AS REMOVING THE LAST SECTION OF YOUR FINGER.

WHY IS DECLAWING AN ISSUE?

Declawing causes pain and is a radical way to deal with a normal cat behavior – scratching. Owners choose declawing to prevent scratching of household items, to decrease the need to punish scratching and to prevent injury to people and animals. However, scratching is normal for cats.

They scratch because:

- 1) Scratching removes the sheath from the claws to make room for new claw growth.
- 2) Scratching is a form of communication. It visually marks an area and leaves behind scent from the glands located between the cat's toes.
- 3) Cats love to stretch and scratching is part of this behaviour.

Some owners believe declawing will stop their cat from preying on birds, climbing trees, or wanting to scratch. Declawing does NOT stop these behaviors, although it may reduce them.

RISKS OF DECLAWING –

MEDICAL RISKS include excessive bleeding, infection, exposure of the remaining bone of the toe, and the risks of anesthesia. Some cats may feel “phantom pain” in their feet for the rest of their lives – the brain detects pain in the claws even though the claws are no longer there.

BEHAVIOURAL RISKS include cats may stop using the litter box, even if soft litter is provided. Some cats may dislike having their feet touched. Declawed cats may be unable to walk comfortably which may reduce their normal activities.

A SAFETY RISK is that they no longer have claws to defend themselves or to help them climb to safety. YOUR CAT IS ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE IF ALLOWED TO GO OUTDOORS. (This should not be used as an excuse to declaw an indoor cat.)

ALTERNATIVES TO DECLAWING –

1. Watch to see if your cat prefers to scratch a horizontal surface like a carpet or a vertical one like the arm of a couch. Many cats like the disposable cardboard mats (from the pet store) that lie on the floor. Or buy a sturdy scratching surface such as a post or mat, made of material like hemp or wood. It should be STABLE and LONG so the cat can stretch while scratching. Place the post or other surface in the cat's favourite location such as near a sleeping area and sprinkle it with catnip, available in your local pet store. When the cat scratches the post, reward him/her with a pat or a treat. Discourage inappropriate scratching with a firm “No!” or a squirt from a water pistol or spray bottle. Kittens can begin scratching when they are less than a month old, so provide a scratching post right from the beginning. When no one is home, close off areas where you don't want the cat to scratch. Use double-sided tape to protect the corners or legs of furniture. *Be careful that your cat does not swallow tape!*

2. Trim your cat's nails - Ask your veterinarian to show you how to do this. By trimming the nails every few weeks, there is less chance that scratching will harm anyone or do damage. You can also ask your vet about plastic nail caps. These coverings are glued to each nail and are replaced every 6 to 12 weeks as the nails grow.

Toronto Cat Rescue believes the practice of declawing is a form of mutilation. We DO NOT declaw ANY cat. If you have any questions about declawing, we will try to help you find a workable solution. Please see www.stopdeclaw.com if you are still not convinced.