



4391 King St East, Kitchener ON  
519-653-1002 gatewayph@bellnet.ca

## Onychectomy (Declawing) of the Domestic Feline

Declawing remains controversial. The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, the American Association of Feline Practitioners and the American Veterinary Medical Association promote training to use the scratching post and discourage declawing as a routine surgical procedure.

**Canadian Veterinary Medical Association Position Statement:** *"Declawing of domestic cats should be considered only after attempts have been made to prevent the cat from using its claws destructively or when clawing presents a zoonotic risk for its owner(s). The CVMA believes it is the obligation of veterinarians to provide cat owners with complete education with regard to feline onychectomy."*

The following points are the foundation for full understanding and disclosure regarding declawing:

1. Scratching is a normal feline behavior, is a means for cats to mark their territory both visually and with scent, and is used for claw conditioning ("husk" removal) and stretching activity. Cats can be trained from a young age to use suitable scratching implements, such as scratching posts, instead of furniture. Please see our hand-out on Encouraging Acceptable Clawing Behavior in Cats for more detailed information.
2. Surgical declawing is not a medically necessary procedure for the cat in most cases. While rare in occurrence, there are inherent risks and complications with any surgical procedure including, but not limited to, anesthetic complications, hemorrhage, infection and pain.
3. Appropriate claw care (consisting of trimming the claws every 1-2 weeks) should be provided to prevent injury or damage to household items. If done correctly, this procedure is well accepted by most cats. Introduce nail trimming as part of routine handling to kittens. .
4. Plastic nail caps, applied every 4-6 weeks, are an option for cats that are easy to handle. After trimming nail tips, fill the cap about a third of the way with adhesive, and fit the cap over the nail. The soft plastic covers prevents furniture damage when the cat scratches.



*"You really should thank me for shredding those. They were atrocious. Want me to do your skirt next?"*

Taking into account the above information, it has been shown that cats with destructive clawing behavior are more likely to be euthanized or abandoned, contributing to the homeless cat population. When

scratching behavior is an issue as to whether or not a particular cat can remain as an acceptable household pet in a particular home, surgical onychectomy may be considered.

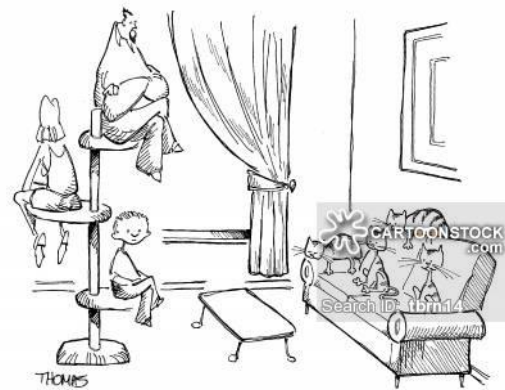
1. If onychectomy is performed, appropriate use of safe and effective anesthetic agents and the use of safe peri-operative analgesics for an appropriate length of time are imperative
2. Declawed cats should be housed indoors

## Encouraging Acceptable Clawing Behavior in Cats

Declawing shouldn't be the first strategy for solving a scratching problem. Give your cat a chance to learn and follow the rule, and you will likely be pleased with the results. Scratching is a natural and satisfying behavior for cats. It provides a good stretch, marks territory and keeps the claws in good shape. If at all possible, we'd rather a cat be allowed to be a cat in all ways, and that includes enjoying the pleasures of scratching.

If you absolutely, positively have no tolerance for scratching, one great alternative to declawing is to adopt a cat who has already been declawed rather than taking home a kitten and having him declawed. If you already have a cat who's driving you crazy clawing your couch, or if you have a new kitten that you want to train to leave your furniture alone, try the following approach:

The best investment you can make for your pet's enjoyment -- and your furniture's preservation -- is a cat tree with a high perch for your pet to look down on the family. (Cats like being above it all!) Sisal, a natural ropelike covering, is a good covering for cat trees, as is carpet with loops that aren't too shaggy. If you're even a little bit handy, you can make your own cat tree by using scrap lumber, sisal or carpet remnants. You can make a cat tree even more appealing by playing games with your cat on the tree and by petting and praising him for scratching there. Some cats may enjoy having fresh catnip rubbed onto the cat tree as added enticement. Try holding treats part way up the scratching surface to encourage scratching and stretching, or affixing appealing toys to it.



Cat trees aren't the only options. Add other approved places for your cat to scratch, such as vertical or horizontal posts, scratching trays filled with corrugated cardboard or scratching pads hung from doorknobs. Some cats prefer cardboard boxes, lumber or logs, or carpet or fabric remnants affixed to stationary objects. Experiment to see what your cat likes best.

Once you have approved scratching areas in place, make the places your cat shouldn't be clawing unattractive by putting double-sided patches or tape on the furniture. If the furniture fabric is too delicate, put the double-sided material on a piece of cardboard that wraps around the corner of the furniture. Never yell or punish your cat for scratching. Cats hate to touch anything sticky, and so anything mounted sticky-side out will discourage scratching.

Start with your scratching alternative near the problem area. Your cat may shift his attention away from your furniture to the scratching post or tree. Offer praise and treats for good behavior.

Once your cat understands what the scratching post is for, you can slowly move it to the part of the room where you'd like it. Try to locate them near areas favored by cats, such as windows or sleeping areas since cats often stretch and scratch upon awakening. Leave the sticky deterrent on the furniture during the retraining and be patient.

Keeping the sharp tips of claws blunt will also help to minimize damage from clawing. It's best to start clipping nail tips when your cat's a kitten, but most adult cats can learn to tolerate the procedure. Use a regular human nail-trimmer, or one from the pet store, and be patient as your cat learns to tolerate having the very tip nipped. Treats and praise are a must!