



Scratching: A Healthy Habit

Cats scratch because it promotes physical health. Scratching removes the dead husks from their claws and allows them to stretch their muscles properly. Think of scratching as yoga for cats – it increases blood circulation and helps prevent muscle rigidity, which can combat issues in old age such as arthritis.

Declawing: What Every Cat Owner Should Know

It is a common misconception that declawing cats is an easy fix for unwanted scratching and clawing. In actuality, declawing is an extremely painful surgery and can lead to lifelong medical problems and litterbox issues.

Currently, many countries have banned the practice of declawing and the United States is gradually following suit. Numerous veterinary clinics have stopped performing the surgery, except in rare cases when it is necessary for medical reasons, such as cancerous tumors in the nail beds of a cat.

Declawing involves the amputation of the last bone of each toe. If performed on a human being, it would be like cutting off each finger at the last knuckle. There are three different procedures when it comes to declawing. It should be noted a study in the 1998 *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* found similar occurrence of lameness and infection in all methods of declawing.

The first is amputating with a guillotine clipper. The wounds are sealed with stitches or surgical glue, and the feet are bandaged to prevent infection. Another method is laser surgery. An intense beam of light cuts through tissue by heating and vaporizing, thus removing the last toe bone. The third procedure, where tendons are severed, is a tendonectomy. The cat keeps their claws in this procedure, but cannot control or extend them to scratch, which has a high rate of growing abnormally thick nails and leads to difficult nail trims. Due to complications with a tendonectomy, a second expensive and painful declaw surgery may be required.

On top of the initial pain of surgery, there can be life-long side effects that cause distress for your cat, such as:

- Removing claws changes the way a cat walks on its paws; it is similar to wearing an uncomfortable pair of shoes every day.
- Arthritis commonly occurs at a younger age in declawed cats due to not being able to stretch their muscles properly.

- When a cat enters a litter box, the texture of the litter can cause pain as the cat's paws have changed. This pain results in some cats not wanting to use the litter box at all.
- Improperly amputated claws can regrow causing nerve damage and bone spurs.
- Some cats may start biting because they no longer have claws for defense.

Healthy Alternatives to Declawing

If you are nervous about the possibility of your cat damaging items in your home and/or wanting to avoid scratches, here are some healthy alternatives:

- Regular nail trims are the key! Please refer to Wayside's handout on how to trim your cat's nails safely and properly.
- Give your cat options for scratching enrichment – place scratching posts and boards in your cat's favorite areas throughout your home. Have these be in a variety of materials (carpet, wood, cardboard) as well as positioning (vertical and horizontal). Add toys, treats, and catnip to lure your cat to use the posts and boards.
- Try soft plastic nail caps, such as Soft Paws. These fasten onto your cat's nails and last about six weeks at a time. Consult your veterinarian for assistance.
- Place double-sided tape to furniture to deter your cat from scratching.

If, after trying these suggestions, you are still experiencing undesirable behaviors in your cat, SUBMIT QUESTIONS by clicking the link under Ask A Trainer on the Behavior and Training page of the Wayside Waifs website: www.waysidewaifs.org.

Written by the Wayside Waifs

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