

Boroughbred Behavior Resources



Issue: Effects of Declawing

Did you know, New York became the first state to ban cat declawing?

Animal Care Centers of NYC recommend against declawing. Declawing cats can have serious consequences for the cat and for you.

Let's first start with a simple question: Why do cats have claws?

Cats are natural hunters and having claws allows them to catch their prey and hold onto them. Although indoor cats may not need to hunt to obtain their next meal, you can see these behaviors unveil during play sessions at home. Having claws also allows cats to climb without falling or slipping and is a means for self-defense if they need to demonstrate the need for distance from potential danger.

Cats exhibit scratching behavior from a young age, which is completely normal. Cats scratch to stretch their muscles, mark their territory, and to remove the dead husks from their claws. The ideal time to train cats to use a scratching post and get them used to nail trims is when they're young, but learning can still be taught at an older age. Pet owners should not consider declawing a prevention for unwanted scratching. Declawing can lead to other, more severe behavior problems down the line, like biting and litterbox aversion, which will be explained further in detail later.

What is declawing?

Declawing involves the amputation of the last bone of each toe. It isn't just the removal of the fingernail. Some cat parents may look into declawing because they want to prevent their cats from scratching on furniture, but we encourage you instead to look for non-surgical alternatives that allow you and your cat to live comfortably in your home.

Adverse effects of declawing

Declawing can lead to medical and physical disadvantages that include back pain, lameness, tissue necrosis, pain in the paw, and infection. Regrowth of improperly removed claws, bone spurs, and nerve damage can occur. Standing on the ground without claws will likely also affect their balance. Have you ever had a pebble stuck in your shoe? That's how it can feel for a declawed cat, except the pebble is permanent!

Removing a cat's claws changes their lives drastically. Their claws are a cat's first line of defense so they'll feel vulnerable without them. Cats are also more likely to bite after being declawed since they don't have the opportunity to scratch as a warning anymore. Declawing may also make it painful to walk in the litterbox, leading to a higher possibility of litter box aversion and eliminating outside the box.

Say **NO** to declaw!

Please note: It is never appropriate to declaw outdoor or indoor/outdoor as they need their nails to move efficiently, climb trees, and defend themselves from predators.

Tips to prevent unwanted scratching

- Trim their nails – Can't do it? Ask your Vet! By sitting them on your lap with their back against your belly, it can help ease the tension. Extend one leg out and press softly on the paw. When you see the nail, clip the tip (be sure to avoid the quick, which is the pink part of the inner nail). Give high value treats in between trimming to keep your cat content during the process. Here's a great video to help make nail trims rewarding for both you and your cat: bit.ly/CatNailTrim
- Provide a scratching post or boards around your home to offer them a preferred place to conduct their scratching. Offer different materials like carpet, sisal, wood, and cardboard. Use catnip and toys to attract them to these places. Keep in mind that some cats prefer to scratch on vertical surfaces and others prefer horizontal surfaces, so offer both initially to gauge their preferences.
- Use a special tape called Sticky Paws or double sided sticky tape to place on furniture to deter your cat from unwanted scratching. Cats don't like the sticky!
- Soft paws are a great alternative to declawing. They are plastic caps that are glued to the cat's nail. They need to be replaced about every six weeks, but they make your cat look fabulous! Please ask your Veterinarian about them.



References:

<https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/declawing-cats-far-worse-manicure>

For more information:

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants: <https://m.iaabc.org/>

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists: <http://corecaab.org/>