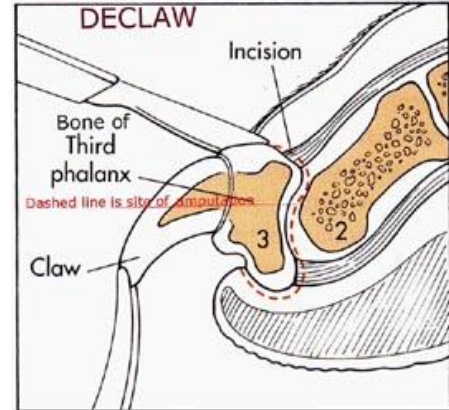


## Declawing and Its Alternatives

By Wendy C. Brooks, DVM, DipABVP

Educational Director, VeterinaryPartner.com

Declawing has probably become the most controversial of all the elective surgical procedures commonly performed by veterinarians. While it is normal for cats to scratch things (to mark territory as well as to condition their claws) this behavior can destroy the bond between an owner and pet cat. The declaw surgery represents a permanent solution to these problems; however, it is popularly held that a number of adverse conditions result from declawing, and that it is a form of mutilation. Pet owners need to sort out the facts from the rumors surrounding this procedure, as well as understanding all of the options involved.



### Training: A Non-Surgical way to save the Furniture

Scratching is a natural behavior of cats, which makes it difficult to modify. The usual goal is to transfer the cat's scratching instinct to a scratching post; it is virtually impossible to control the desire to scratch completely. In general, this kind of training requires a great deal of time at home. Training tips include:

- Cats seem to prefer to scratch upholstery with a vertical drag to the fabric. Furniture can be upholstered in an unacceptable fabric and a scratching post can be swathed in an appropriate fabric (rather than the usual carpet).
- Furniture can be made unacceptable by using plastic or even aluminum foil to cover the target pieces. Spray-on antiperspirants can be sprayed on the furniture as a repellent. Double stick tape can be used on furniture to create an undesirable scratching area.
- Treats or catnip can be used to attract the cat to the scratching post.
- The cat can be punished for furniture scratching attempts but it is important that the cat not connect the punishment with the person administering it (otherwise the cat will simply learn not to scratch while that person is watching). Yelling, spanking, or shaking a can with pennies in it is too directly associated with the person rather than the act of scratching. A water squirt bottle is better but only if the cat does not see where the squirt comes from.

### Nail Trimming

For some cats, simply keeping the nails short is adequate control but many people do not know how to trim their cat's nails. In fact, the non-pigmented nail of a cat makes it easy to see where not to cut. If you would like to learn how to trim your cat's nails, please ask one of our experienced technicians.

### The Surgery

Traditionally, the declaw has been performed with a surgical blade or special clippers. Recently, the laser declaw has received a great deal of attention. In this surgery, a laser rather than a scalpel blade is used to disarticulate the third toe bone. Advantages of laser surgery include virtually no bleeding (during surgery or afterwards), less post-operative pain, and in many cases, no bandages. At All Creatures Animal

Hospital, all of our declaws are performed with a surgical laser. Before surgery, the patient will receive pain medication and local anesthesia applied to the front paws. Following surgery, the paws are treated with the cold laser to reduce inflammation and encourage healing. Then cold packs are applied to continue to help with the inflammation. The patients are kept overnight to monitor for any signs of infection, bleeding or swelling of paws and sent home the next day. The aftercare for a declaw requires diligence on the part of the owner to keep the patient calm and prevent them from jumping and possibly reinjuring their paws. A declawed cat cannot EVER be allowed outside. If you cannot make this commitment, a declaw is not the best option for your pet.