

## HOW DECLAWING AFFECTS YOU AND YOUR CAT

- De-clawing a cat requires an amputation of each toe at the first knuckle bone. This is a cosmetic surgery for the owner, not for the cat. This surgery is extreme and causes continuous pain for the kitty that is expected to walk and use its paws almost immediately after surgery.
- Contrary to most people's understanding, declawing consists of amputating not just the claws, but the whole phalanx (up to the joint), including bones, ligaments, and tendons! To remove the claw, the bone, nerve, joint capsule, collateral ligaments, and the extensor and flexor tendons must all be amputated. Thus declawing is not a "simple", single surgery but 10 separate, painful amputations of the third phalanx up to the last joint of each toe. A graphic comparison in human terms would be the cutting off of a person's finger at the last joint of each finger.
- Complications of this amputation can be excruciating pain, damage to the radial nerve, hemorrhage, bone chips that prevent healing, painful regrowth of deformed claw inside of the paw which is not visible to the eye, and chronic back and joint pain as shoulder, leg and back muscles weaken.
- A cat's claws are used for balance, for exercising, and for stretching the muscles in their legs, back, shoulders, and paws. The toes help the foot meet the ground at a precise angle to keep the leg, shoulder and back muscles and joints in proper alignment. Removal of the last digits of the toes drastically alters the conformation of their feet and causes the feet to meet the ground at an unnatural angle that can cause back pain similar to that in humans caused by wearing improper shoes. Cats also tend to develop arthritis in their hindquarters due to the physical change in balance and style of walking and carrying their weight.
- Cats who were lively and friendly have become withdrawn and introverted after being declawed. Others, deprived of their primary means of defense, become nervous, fearful, and/or aggressive, often resorting to their only remaining means of defense, their teeth. In some cases, when declawed cats use the litterbox after surgery, their feet are so tender they associate their new pain with the box...permanently, resulting in a life-long aversion to using the litter box.
- Other declawed cats that can no longer mark with their claws, they mark with urine instead resulting in inappropriate elimination problems, which in many cases, results in relinquishment of the cats to shelters and ultimately euthanasia. Many of the cats surrendered to shelters are surrendered because of behavioral problems which developed after the cats were declawed.
- Many declawed cats become so traumatized by this painful mutilation that they end up spending their maladjusted lives perched on top of doors and refrigerators, out of reach of real and imaginary predators against whom they no longer have any adequate defense.  
A cat relies on its claws as its primary means of defense. Removing the claws makes a cat feel defenseless. The constant state of stress caused by a feeling of defenselessness may make some declawed cats more prone to disease. Stress leads to a myriad of physical and psychological disorders including suppression of the immune system, cystitis and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)..

Written by Veterinarian, Dr. Christianne Schelling

Please visit <http://www.declawing.com/> for more information and alternatives to declawing.

## ALTERNATIVES TO DECLAWING

- Trimming the toe nails. A simple and easy solution, especially if you start with a kitten.  
**COST: The price of toe nail trimmers (approximately \$2.00-10.00)**

- A water bottle (squirt bottle) is an effective way to modify cat scratching behavior. It must be used at the time of scratching to deter the kitty. After several times the kitty will begin to associate scratching that piece of furniture with water and discontinue the behavior.

**COST: The price of a water bottle (approximately \$1.00-5.00)**

- Cardboard scratching pads are another excellent way to help kitty trim toenails. They love the feeling of the cardboard and the cat nip that comes with it! They can maximize the stretch.

**Cost: Approximately \$5.00-15.00**

- A sturdy cat tree that can not tip over when the cat stretches. Reminder, if you do not want the cat to scratch the carpeting, get a tree with a different type of fiber (sisal, sisal rope is a good alternative).

**COST: Approximately \$10.00 - \$200.00 depending on how big you want to go.**

- Soft Paws (visit [softpaws.com](http://softpaws.com)). They are rubber tips that cover the toenail. They are an excellent alternative for declawing. There are many colors to choose from. The tips last 4-6 weeks at a time. You can do it yourself or have a groomer or vet help you.

**COST: DIY- Approximately \$20.00 for a set of 40 tips. Groomer: About \$15.00-20.00 per visit**

## COST OF DECLAWING A CAT:

- Upwards of \$250.00-\$500 for the surgery.
- Cost of tearing out carpeting and replacing with tile (due to inappropriate urination)
- Cost of replacing the linens on your beds (due to inappropriate urination)
- Cost of continuous medical care for illness related to the declaw surgery such as arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome and urinary tract infections.
- Cost of trips to the doctor due to bites from your declawed cat.
- Cost of the emotional strain on your family when you need to decide you can no longer live with a cat with behavior problems.