

As of July 1, 2007, cats adopted from the Animal Welfare League of Arlington may not be declawed.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT DECLAWING

What is a cat claw?

- A cat's claw is not a toenail at the end of the toe as it is in other animals. It is a moveable digit attached to a muscle as a finger might be
- Without a claw, your cat can not properly grasp, hold or establish footing for proper walking, running, springing, climbing, or stretching
- A cat's claws are also its best defense mechanism

Why do cats scratch?

- Scratching is a natural cat behavior
- Scratching keeps claws sharp and clean and removes the outer sheath of the nail
- Scratching keeps claws in shape and helps stretch and tone their muscles
- Scratching fulfills a cat's strong instinctive need to mark its territory

What is declawing?

- Declawing is the removal of the claw and the first bone of the toe and is comparable to the removal of the human finger at the first knuckle
- When the end digit, including the claw is removed, the sensory and motor nerves are cut, damaged and destroyed; they do not repair themselves or grow

What happens after declawing surgery?

- After waking, cats may thrash from wall to wall in the cage, howl, and shake their feet as if trying to fling them away
- First there is a lack of feeling, then a tingling sensation
- During recovery, the cat must walk on the stub end of the second digit
- The cat may not rest his feet but must continue to scratch in the litter box, walk, and jump despite the pain

What are the physical risks of declawing?

- Abscesses result or the claws may grow back abnormally, creating a painful and bloody sore or becoming infected
- Post surgical blood loss can occur and if the bandages are wrapped too tightly circulation can be cut off and cause gangrene
- Chronic or intermittent lameness may occur
- Newly declawed cats shift their body weight backward off the sore toes. This gait can cause stress on the leg joints and spine and if it persists would lead to damage and arthritic changes in multiple joints

What are the behavioral risks of declawing?

- With no means to defend itself, a cat may bite at the least provocation and be more difficult to handle

- Some cats may learn to associate the pain and discomfort of scratching in the litterbox with the litterbox itself, and may no longer use the litterbox but choose a more comfortable surface to go on such as the carpet, bed, or sofa
- A recent national survey of shelters from the Caddo Parrish Forgotten Felines and Friends, indicates that approximately 70% of cats turned in to shelters for behavior problems are declawed
- In the 2002 summer issue of PETA's Animal Times: "A survey by a Delaware animal shelter showed that more than 75% of the cats turned in for avoiding their litterboxes had been declawed."

What do other countries and organizations have to say about declawing?

- Declawing is illegal in England and is illegal or considered extremely inhumane in 25 countries in the world
- The Humane Society of the United States "opposes declawing of cats when done solely for the convenience of the owner and without benefit of the animal." Further, they "oppose any other unnecessary surgical procedure that is painful, distressful, or restrictive of the function of the body part involved when done for cosmetic purposes or to disguise natural imperfections of any animal."
- The American Humane Association states "Because of the postoperative discomfort and pain and potential behavioral or physical effects, American Humane condemns declawing or tendonectomy surgery when it is performed solely for the convenience of the guardian."

What are the alternatives to declawing?

- Trim the cat's claws weekly using nail clippers to remove the white tip of each claw. Do not trim too closely to the dark red portion or "quick." Ask your vet to show you how.
- Provide the cat with at least a flat or inclined corrugated cardboard scratching box. They should also have a vertical scratching post. The post should be at least 28 inches tall, stabilized so it doesn't fall over, and made of a coarse material like sisal, rope, or carpet turned inside out. Make the post fun and desirable with catnip, toys, and treats. Praise the cat when they use it.
- Use a repellent such as perfume or vinegar on the former scratching places, or cover them with plastic, tape, or aluminum foil to make them undesirable.
- "Sticky Paws" can be applied to furniture as well; it is a sticky surface that cats hate to scratch. It is odor-free and safe for furniture.
- A squirt with water, clapping hands, and a firm "no" will remind the cat where not to scratch. Then, put the cat on the post instead.
- There are temporary nail caps called "Soft Paws" that you can put on a cat's claws to help prevent damage due to scratching.

