

# Paws Come with Claws

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**Is Declawing Cruel?** Yes, it is. To remove a cat's claws is far worse than to deprive cat owners of their fingernails. This is because the claws have so many important functions in the life of a cat. A declawed cat is a maimed cat, and anyone considering having the operation done to his pet should think again. People hastily declaw cats hoping to protect their furniture as well as themselves from potential scratches. It's natural for a cat to scratch, but with a little human effort, you can direct that energy so that you, your cat, and your furniture can comfortably live together.

Consider the facts. To begin with, it is important that every cat should keep itself well groomed. A smooth, clean coat of fur is essential for a cat's well-being. It is vital for temperature control, for cleanliness, for waterproofing, and for controlling the scent signaling the feline body. As a result, cats spend a great deal of time every day dealing with their toilet. In addition to the typical licking movements, they perform repeated scratchings. These scratching actions are a crucial part of the cleaning routine, getting rid of skin irritations, dislodging dead hairs, and combing out tangles in the fur. Without claws, it is impossible for any cat to scratch itself efficiently, and the whole grooming pattern suffers as a result. Even if the human owners help out with brush and comb, there is no way they can replace the sensitivity of the natural scratching response of their pet. Anyone who has ever suffered an itch that can't be scratched will sympathize with the dilemma of the declawed cat.

It has been argued that a declawed cat can learn to use its teeth more when grooming. It is true that cats often nibble an irritation rather than scratch it, but unfortunately, some of the most urgent scratching requirements are in the region of the head, mouth, neck, and especially, the ears. Teeth are useless here, and these important parts of the body cannot be kept in perfect condition with only clawless feet to groom them.

A second problem faces the declawed cat when it tries to climb. Climbing is second nature to all small felines, and it is virtually impossible for a cat to switch off its urge to climb, even if it is punished for doing so. And punished it certainly will be if it attempts to climb after having its claws removed, for it will no longer have any grip in its feet. Even the simple act of climbing up onto a chair or a window ledge may prove hazardous. Without the pinpoint contact of the tips of the claws, the animals may find themselves slipping and crashing to the ground. The expression of disbelief and confusion that is observed on the faces of such cats as they pick themselves up is in itself sufficient to turn any cat lover against the idea of claw removal. If the cat accidentally gets out of doors, it is defenseless against enemies (other cats in a cat fight, dogs, mean humans, etc.). In addition, scratching offers psychological comfort through its rhythmic action, and reassurance of self-defense by the contraction of the claws.

In addition to destroying the animal's ability to groom, climb, defend itself against rivals, and protect itself from enemies, the operation of declawing also eliminates the cat's ability to hunt. This may not be important for a well-fed family pet, but if ever such a cat were to find itself lost or homeless, it would rapidly die of starvation. The vital grab at a mouse with sharp claws extended would become a useless gesture.

In short, a declawed cat is a crippled, mutilated cat, and no excuse can justify the operation. Despite this, many pet cats are carried off to the vet by exasperated owners for this type of convenience surgery. The operation, although nearly always refused by vets in Britain, has become so common in certain countries that it even has an official name. It is called *onyxectomy*. Using an old Greek name for it somehow makes it seem more respectable. The literal translation of onyxectomy, however, is simply "nail-cutting out" and that is what vets are doing, even though they may not like to be reminded of the fact when they record their day's work.

The consequences of declawing are often pathetic. Changes in behavior can occur. A declawed cat frequently resorts to biting when confronted with even minor threats. Biting becomes an overcompensation for the insecurity of having no claws. Bungled surgery can result in the regrowth of deformed claws or in an infection leading to gangrene. Balance is affected by the inability to grasp with their claws. Chronic physical ailments such as cystitis or skin disorders can be manifestations of a declawed cat's frustration and stress.

The reason for the popularity of the declawing operation in recent years has been the concern of owners for their furnishings. Valuable chair fabrics, curtains, cushions, and other materials are often found scratched, torn, and tattered as a result of the family cat's claw sharpening activities around the house, and the addition of commercially manufactured scratching posts to the indoor furniture rarely seems to solve the problem by itself. It takes other measures by the pet owner in combination with an alternative scratching area. Home furnishings are expensive, but a cat's well-being is priceless.

Scratches to humans can be avoided by always handling cats gently and respectfully and keeping a cat's claws clipped (described in my care and grooming section of the Dandy Lions home page) is the single best way to prevent scratches to humans, as well as to reduce a cat's need for scratching to keep nails sharpened.

Your cat should trust you, and depend upon you for protection. Don't betray that trust by declawing your cat. Below are safe alternatives to declawing your cat.

## Six Simple Alternatives to Declawing Your Cat:

1. A tall, sturdy and heavy scratching post sprinkled occasionally with catnip is the favored alternative. Some cats are partial to sisal doormats.
2. When selecting furniture, a closely woven fabric is the best. Cats find this type of fabric difficult to pierce with their claws.
3. When your cat begins to scratch on a piece of furniture, give him a firm warning such as "No, Kitty!" and then give him a quick squirt from a mister or water pistol. This should discourage him. Then call him to his scratching post with a food treat and praise him when he comes and uses the post. This may have to be done over and over until he understands.
4. If accustomed to the procedure, cats will tolerate having the curved part of their claws clipped regularly. Consult your veterinarian for instructions.
5. Until your cat learns that only the scratching posts (it's recommended that you have several), are for scratching, cover his favorite furniture scratching areas with either one or a combination of aluminum foil, a loosely woven fabric, double-sided tape, or blown up balloons taped to the furniture.
6. When playing with a kitten or cat, NEVER use your hand or arms in play. This teaches him that people are toys and he may scratch simply in play. Each time your cat scratches you, give him a loud "OUCH" and leave the room. One of the most effective punishments for a cat is being ignored.

Scratching is the very essence of a cat being a cat. These simple, inexpensive modifications in your cat's behavior and environment can eliminate damaged furniture and scratched humans.

Remember, declawing is radical surgery that involves amputating the first joint of a cat's toes. It's permanent, expensive, and irreversible, and may have unwanted affect on your cat's behavior. Please consider other alternatives such as SOFTPAWS nail caps before committing your cat to surgery.

# Maine Coon Adoptions