

WHAT TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU DECLAW YOUR CAT

Some people decide to declaw their cats to prevent or resolve a scratching problem. The Humane Society of Harrisburg Area recommends that you do not declaw cats, because declawing has not been proven an effective method for improving behavioral issues, including aggression towards people or other cats. It should never be used as a behavioral remedy or as a preventive measure. The only circumstances in which the procedure should be considered are those in which all behavioral and environmental alternatives have been fully explored, and have proven ineffective, and the cat is at grave risk of euthanasia.

The term “declaw” is actually a misnomer. It implies that declawing only involves the removal of a cat’s claws. In reality, declawing is the amputation of the last digital bone, including the nail bed and claw, on the front of each toe. Cat’s suffer from significant pain while recovering from this procedure. The surgery introduces the cat to the risk of anesthesia, excessive bleeding, bone spurs and postoperative complications, including infection and is accompanied by pain that may last from several days to much longer unless appropriate pain control is provided.

The physical complications are more concrete and easily studied and documented. Less proven, more controversial, but not without merit, are the psychological and behavioral complications resulting from declawing a cat.

- **Biting:** Some believe cats are more likely to bite after they have been declawed because they no longer have their claws as the first line of defense.
- **Personality change:** Changes in personality are believed to be caused by the cat becoming withdrawn and introverted due to the shock of being declawed. Once involved and interactive with human family members, the cat may now keep to itself, perched out of reach of “predators” now that its defenses are diminished.
- **Litter box issues:** Perhaps one of the more easily documented behavioral concerns resulting from having a cat declawed. It is commonly thought litter box issues begin during the recovery process when the cat may associate the pain being felt in its feet with the litter box. In some cases, avoidance or a phobia of the litter box can be long term, even permanent.
- **Marking:** As mentioned above, claws are used to mark a cat’s territory. Territorial marking is an ingrained behavior in even domestic cats. Removing the ability to mark with the claws may mean the cat finds another way to mark territory. This is usually done by urinating to mark territory. This is usually thought (by humans) to be less than desirable.
- **Increased stress:** Removing a defense mechanism can increase the stress level in some cats. Increased stress levels can lower the immune system which, in turn can make the cat more susceptible to illness.

