

# Declawing Alternatives

Declawing is an irreversible surgical procedure that involves amputating the last joint of the cat's "toes." It is a very painful procedure with strong potential for secondary complications. (Imagine having the last joint of your own fingers amputated. Not a pleasant idea.)

Deep digital flexor tendonectomy is a surgical procedure where the tendons attached to the end toe digit are severed but the claw is left in the sheath. After this surgery, the cat can no longer extend its claws, though they do still grow and must be trimmed regularly. This surgery has no medical benefit to the cat, and is done under general anaesthetic, with the attendant risks of disability or even death. Recovery may be lengthy and painful. Postoperative complications may include infections and hemorrhage, and have been known to include abnormal growth of severed nerve ends, which can cause long-term pain in the toes.

A cat's claws are a vital part of its anatomy, essential to balance, mobility, defense, grooming and survival. Many European countries have now ruled declawing illegal, as it is considered inhumane.

In addition to being an intrinsic part of a cat's normal conformation, its front claws are a cat's primary defense. Once declawed, there is no replacement or regrowth of the claws. You may think, "My cat never goes outside." But what if your cat accidentally gets outside? It is now defenseless in a potentially hostile environment, and if it gets lost, it is unable to hunt and will rapidly starve to death.

## Behavior/Health Problems Associated with Declawing

Aside from the loss of the cat's defense mechanism, declawing can cause severe physical and behavioural problems. Deprived of its front claws, the cat may become insecure and distressed. Common issues caused by declawing include:

### "Spraying" or inappropriate urination

Declawed cats will often stop using the litter box due to the pain caused by digging in the litter, choosing instead a soft surface like your bed, laundry or carpets.

### Biting

A declawed cat frequently resorts to biting when confronted with even minor threats. Biting becomes an overcompensation for the insecurity of having no claws. Additionally, since the cat has no claws that it can use to draw things towards itself, it will resort to using its teeth instead.

### Balance and muscle problems

Declawing removes the first joint of the cat's toes, destroying its ability to balance and walk naturally. This can lead to muscle problems in the front quarters. Being out of balance is also extremely distressing to a cat, whose very life is about balance.



## Stress-related illnesses

Chronic physical ailments such as cystitis (bladder problems) or skin disorders can be manifestations of a declawed cat's frustration and stress.

## Inability to groom

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 skin health. 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, leading to poor coat and skin condition.

## Infection

Post-surgical infections can result in blood poisoning or gangrene. In severe cases, the foot or leg may need to be amputated.

## Safe Alternatives to Declawing

People hastily declaw cats hoping to protect their furniture and themselves from potential scratches. It's natural for a cat to scratch, but with a little effort, you can direct that energy so that you, your cat, and your furniture can comfortably live together. These simple, inexpensive modifications in your cat's behavior and environment can eliminate damaged furniture and scratched humans.

- A tall, sturdy and heavy scratching post sprinkled occasionally with catnip is the favored alternative. Some cats are partial to sisal doormats. Place the posts on, near or over the areas where your cat scratches.
- When selecting furniture, a closely woven fabric is the best. Cats find this type of fabric difficult to pierce with their claws.
- 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 plant 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.
- If accustomed to the procedure, cats will tolerate having the curved part of their claws clipped regularly. Consult your veterinarian for instructions, and always use pet nail clippers (never use scissors, as they will tear the claw).
- 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.
- 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.



- SOFTPAWS nail caps are lightweight vinyl nail caps that you glue on the cat's front claws. They are an excellent choice for indoor cats, but should not be used on outdoor pets as they prevent climbing or defense.

Scratches to humans can be avoided by always handling cats gently and respectfully. Keeping a cat's claws trimmed 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.

### More Information

For more information on reasons not to declaw, declawing alternatives and countries where declawing is outlawed, please visit <http://www.declawing.com/>.

Felix Katnip Tree Company • [www.felixkatniptreecompany.com](http://www.felixkatniptreecompany.com)

Homemade Cat Ladder • [www.caws.org](http://www.caws.org)

How to Build a Scratching Post • [www.catsinternational.org](http://www.catsinternational.org)

Sticky Paws • w1-888-697-2873 • [www.stickypaws.com](http://www.stickypaws.com)

Soft Paws • 1-800-989-2542 • [www.softpaws.com](http://www.softpaws.com)



**The Simple, Non-Surgical & Humane Alternative to Declawing. And, They're Fun!**

Soft Claws also known as Soft Paws were developed by a veterinarian. Soft Claws are vinyl nail caps that work great for problem cat scratching and are a great alternative to cat declawing.

Soft Claws helps protect you and your home from problem scratching. If you've tried other ways of preventing your cat from scratching, you'll really appreciate the simplicity and effectiveness of Soft Claws. Training cats to stop scratching takes time and patience and is often ineffective. Nail trims last only a short time before claws are again sharp enough to scratch skin and cause damage to household surfaces such as drapes, carpets and furniture.

While scratching is natural behavior for cats, it can often cause problems for cat owners. For years, the standard solution was to declaw the cat. Now you have an alternative to declawing that is both practical and painless.

Soft Claws Nail Caps offer an alternative for cat owners who face any of these common situations:

- Older cats at risk for declawing
- Kittens too young to be declawed
- Feline skin conditions irritated by hind-claw scratching
- Destructive claw-sharpening in the home
- Outdoor cats living indoors temporarily
- Unintentional injuries to you and your family caused by playful cats.

**Soft Paws can be purchased online at [softpaws.com](http://softpaws.com) or [www.SafePetProducts.com](http://www.SafePetProducts.com)**



If you need further assistance go to [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org), [www.mobilespca.org](http://www.mobilespca.org) or email the Mobile SPCA at [spca@mobilespca.org](mailto:spca@mobilespca.org)



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*Adapted from material originally developed by applied animal behaviorists at the Dumb Friends League, Denver, Colorado.*

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This material is brought to you by the Maddie's Fund,<sup>®</sup> the Maddie's Pet Rescue Project in Mobile.

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