DECLAWING:
What you need to know

If you are considering declawing your cat, please read this. It will only take a moment, and it will give you valuable information to help you in your decision.

First, you should know that declawing is pretty much an American thing, it's something people do for their own convenience without realizing what actually happens to their beloved cat. In England declawing is termed "inhumane" and "unnecessary mutilation." I agree. In many European countries it is illegal. I applaud their attitude.

Before you make the decision to declaw your cat, there are some important facts you should know. Declawing is not like a manicure. It is serious surgery. Your cat's claw is not a toenail. It is actually closely adhered to the bone. So closely adhered that to remove the claw, the last bone of your the cat's claw has to be removed. Declawing is actually an amputation of the last joint of your cat's "toes". When you envision that, it becomes clear why declawing is not a humane act. It is a painful surgery, with a painful recovery period. And remember that during the time of recuperation from the surgery your cat would still have to use its feet to walk, jump, and scratch in its litter box regardless of the pain it is experiencing. Wheelchairs and bedpans are not an option for a cat.

No cat lover would doubt that cats--whose senses are much keener than ours--suffer pain. They may, however, hide it better. Not only are they proud, they instinctively know that they are at risk when in a weakened position, and by nature will attempt to hide it. But make no mistake. This is not a surgery to be taken lightly.

Your cat's body is perfectly designed to give it the grace, agility and beauty that is unique to felines. Its claws are an important part of this design. Amputating the important part of their anatomy that contains the claws drastically alters the conformation of their feet. The cat is also deprived of its primary means of defense, leaving it prey to predators if it ever escapes to the outdoors.

I have also had people tell me that their cat's personality changed after being declawed. Although, the medical community does not recognize this as potential side effect.

Soft Paws are lightweight vinyl nail caps that you glue on the cat's front claws. They're great for households with small children and are extremely useful for people who are away from home all day and can't exercise the watchfulness necessary to train a cat to use a scratching post. Soft Paws® are easy to apply and last about four to six weeks. They come in clear or colors--which are really fun. Now that's a kitty manicure! The colored caps look spiffy on Tabby or Tom and have the added advantage of being more visible when one finally comes off. Then you simply replace it.
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Unlike most mammals who walk on the soles of the paws or feet, cats are digitigrades, which means they walk on their toes. Their back, shoulder, paw and leg joints, muscles, tendons, ligaments and nerves are naturally designed to support and distribute the cat's weight across its toes as it walks, runs and climbs. A cat's claws are used for balance, for exercising, and for stretching the muscles in their legs, back, shoulders, and paws. They stretch these muscles by digging their claws into a surface and pulling back against their own clawhold - similar to isometric exercising for humans. This is the only way a cat can exercise, stretch and tone the muscles of its back and shoulders. 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.

Many vets and clinic staff deliberately misinform and mislead clients into believing that declawing removes only the claws in the hopes that clients are left with the impression that the procedure is a "minor" surgery comparable to spay/neuter procedures and certainly doesn't involve amputation (partial or complete) of the terminal-toe bone, ligaments and tendons. Some vets rationalize the above description by saying that since the claw and the third phalanx (terminal toe bone) are so firmly connected, they simply use the expression "the claw" to make it simpler for clients to "understand". Other vets are somewhat more honest and state that if they used the word "amputation", most clients would not have the surgery performed! Onychectomy in the clinical definition involves either the partial or total amputation of the terminal bone. That is the only method. What differs from vet to vet is the type of cutting tool used (guillotine-type cutter, scalpel or laser).

Declawing is not without complication. The rate of complication is relatively high compared with other so-called routine procedures. Complications of this amputation can be excruciating pain, damage to the radial nerve, hemorrhage; bone chips that prevent healing, painful re-growth 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.
Other complications include postoperative hemorrhage, either immediate or following bandage removal is a fairly frequent occurrence, paw ischemia, lameness due to wound infection or footpad laceration, exposure necrosis of the second phalanx, and abscess associated with retention of portions of the third phalanx. Abscess due to re-growth must be treated by surgical removal of the remnant of the third phalanx and wound debridement. During amputation of the distal phalanx, the bone may shatter and cause what is called a sequestrum, which serves as a focus for infection, causing continuous drainage from the toe. This necessitates a second anesthesia and surgery. Abnormal growth of severed nerve ends can also occur, causing long-term, painful sensations in the toes. Infection will occasionally occur when all precautions have been taken.

Taken from declawing.com Written by Veterinarian, Dr. Christianne Schelling