

DECLAWING – MAKING A HUMANE DECISION

Middlesex Veterinary Center encourages pet owners to seek alternatives to the declawing of cats - if you are thinking about having your pet declawed, please take a moment to review the following information:

Why are claws important to a cat?

A cat's remarkable grace, agility, and sense of balance are in part due to its retractable claws, which allow it to establish footing for walking, running, springing climbing or stretching. A cat's claws are also its best defense mechanism.

Why do cats scratch?

The outer part of a cat's claws regularly becomes frayed. When the cat scratches, it pulls off this outer part and exposes sharp, smooth claws. Scratching is also a way of fulfilling a cat's strong, instinctive need to mark its territory. Not only do cats mark objects by scratching them, but the scratching deposits secretions from glands in the feet that can be smelled by other cats. Scratching can also provide valuable stretching and foot muscle exercise.

What is declawing?

The standard declawing procedure calls for the removal of the claw and the first bone of the toe. The operation is usually performed on the front feet and is actually an amputation comparable to the removal of human fingertips at the first joint. The cat experiences pain in the recovery and healing process.

What risks are associated with declawing?

Medical Risks

An incorrectly positioned cut during declawing surgery can remove too much of the toe, taking with it part or the toe's entire pad. But if the whole claw is not removed, misshapen claws can grow back. In addition, if a bone fragment is left at the surgery site, it may become a source of infection.

Both claw regrowth and infection necessitate additional surgery. Post surgical blood loss is another concern, but great care must be taken that bandages wrapped tightly to control bleeding do not cut off circulation.

Safety Risks

A declawed cat must never be allowed outdoors; its ability to defend itself or escape from danger has been seriously impaired.

What are alternatives to declawing?

Buy or make a scratching post that's tall enough so the cat can stretch completely when scratching and stable enough so it won't wobble when being used. Make the post a fun place to be by placing toys on and around it and by rubbing it with catnip, and put it in an accessible area. If you're trying to discourage the cat from scratching a particular piece of furniture, try placing the post in front of it, moving the post aside as the cat begins to use it. Train with a dual approach, encourage the cat to claw the right things and discourage him from clawing the wrong things by using aids such as tin foil, bitter sprays and sticky tape.