

## Alternatives to Declawing

Before you decide to declaw your feline friend, it is always advisable to think about why you are doing it and to try other alternatives to this elective procedure if possible.

Train your cat to use a scratching post. The type of post (height, texture), placement and attractiveness should all be considered. Go to [www.Askdryin.com](http://www.Askdryin.com) (search: cat scratching) for helpful hints on training your cat and enriching their environment to help deter destructive scratching



Clip your cat's nails. Sometimes simply trimming the nails prevents a lot of damage to furniture and screens. Ask your veterinarian to show you how to do this.

Apply Soft Paws. Soft Paws are soft, plastic coverings glued to the cat's existing nails so they can't cause damage or scratch skin. They must be reapplied as the natural claw is shed off periodically.



## Questions to Ask Your Pet's Doctor

- Risks  
Will my pet be given an exam before surgery? Do you recommend any pre-anesthetic blood work? What qualifications does your staff have? What type of monitoring will my cat receive during the procedure? Are there any precautions I should take before the surgery?
- The Procedure  
How is the procedure performed (guillotine, scalpel, laser)? What type of wound closure is used (none, glue, sutures)?
- Pain Management  
Is a local block used? Will my cat be given any pre/post anesthetic pain or anti-inflammatory medication? Will I be giving pain medication at home and for how long? Can I get refills if needed?
- Postoperative Homecare  
What type of litter should I use and for how long? What about other pets at home? What do I do if there is a problem? How long will it take the paws to heal?

*Whatever your reasoning for considering to declaw your cat, you should be aware of how the procedure is performed, what type of pain management your cat will receive and what possible risks and complications might occur.*



Eau Claire

**ANIMAL HOSPITAL**

Information compliments of  
Dr. Jodi Bohl, DVM  
Eau Claire Animal Hospital  
[ecah@clearwire.net](mailto:ecah@clearwire.net)

## Understanding the Declaw Surgery



*Look inside to find out:*

What you should know before scheduling the surgery:

- \*Understanding a cat's claw anatomy
- \*Pros and cons of declawing
- \*The surgical procedure and recovery
- \*Possible short and long-term complications
- \*Psychological and behavior complications
- \*Alternative to declawing

Questions to ask your veterinarian before surgery

*If you are thinking about whether to have your feline friend declawed, first consider one of the non-surgical alternatives. If this isn't working, then research the procedure carefully, find a veterinarian who will listen to your concerns and provide a carefully planned course of pain management. In addition, make sure you adhere to all the post-operative instructions at home to ensure your pet experiences the least amount of pain and stress as possible.*

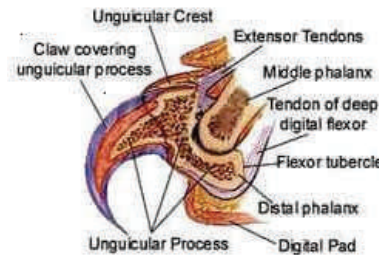
## Pros and Cons of Declawing

Owners should think carefully about WHY they want to declaw their pet. Dr. Bonnie Beaver, Professor at Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine and nationally known animal behavior authority notes that declawing a cat has both positive and negative considerations. "In cases where the cat is destroying the inside of the home and retraining it to use a scratching post hasn't worked, or when it lives with the elderly, a diabetic or severely immunocompromised person, the decision becomes one of either declawing the cat or having to relocate or euthanize it...The decision of whether to declaw should be made by a well-informed owner in consultation with a veterinarian." Dr. Beaver says the negatives of declawing include the pain the animal endures after the procedure and it might affect the animal's walking ability. Also, some cats might find it more painful to use the litter box and some cats are often defenseless in attacks by other animals. Dr. Beaver concludes "owners should discuss [the pros and cons] with their veterinarian before coming to a decision.



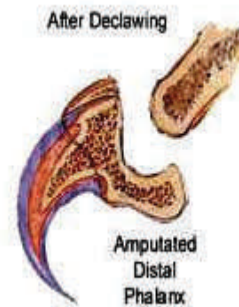
## Feline Claw Anatomy

Unlike other mammals, cats walk on their toes not on their feet or pads. The claws are used for balance, exercise and for stretching. Scratching is a very important part of a cat's behavior. Scratching is a natural instinctive impulse that involves climbing, chasing, exercising and marking their territory. A cat also relies on its claws as its primary means of defense against attacks. The cat's claw is not a nail as is a human fingernail, it is a part of the last bone in the cat's toe. The cells that produce the claw are produced in the last bone.



## The Surgical Procedure

"Onychectomy" is defined as the partial or total amputation of the last bone of each toe. The type of instrument used to perform this procedure differs from doctor to doctor (guillotine, scalpel or laser). Contrary to most people's understanding, declawing consists of amputating not just the claw but the entire last bone including the ligament, tendon, nerve and joint capsule.



## Psychological/Behavioral Complications

A lot of cats seem to do fine after the declaw procedure. However, other cats develop various changes in their demeanor and personalities. Some of the changes seen include withdrawal and isolation, increased nervousness and aggression and some resort to using their teeth in situations where they need to defend themselves. Some cats will develop urinary problems due to pain associated with using their litter box. The incidence of these issues increases greatly if pain management before, during and after surgery is not a priority.

## Possible Short and Long Term Complications

Short term complications may include post-op bleeding, pain, infections, opening of the incisions or abscesses due to a foreign body (primarily clay litter used too soon after surgery).

Long term complications may include chronic pain from nerve damage, pain in back and shoulder joints due to change in mobility and regrowth of the claw due to incomplete removal of the last bone.