

MY CATS SCRATCHING MY FURNITURE! WHAT CAN I DO?

Declawing cats is an emotional topic. Declawing should only be considered when a cat shows the typical territorial-marking behavior that is damaging to furniture and carpet, or when there is a human health risk in the household. We hope that the information in this handout will help you make an informed decision about this procedure.

Cats claw at things to mark territory. It is a very specific type of clawing that takes place on both vertical and horizontal surfaces. It is rapid back and forth action with the front feet that leaves not only a visual sign from the claw marks but also scent signal from glands in the toe pads. Once a cat has been declawed, it will frequently continue to exhibit behavior on its favorite surfaces.

Cats can do a lot of damage with their clawing. It can be very difficult to deter a cat that has a strong urge to mark territory in this way. Cats like surfaces that are coarse and have low nap; surfaces that mimic tree bark. So if you are trying to make a scratching post, use burlap backing of a carpet remnant or tightly wrapped marine rope around the core. Behavior modification techniques can be used to try to redirect the activity, but these are labor intensive and require a pretty strong commitment. Basically you want to make the object that is being clawed, or the area that the object is in, undesirable. Double-sided carpet tape can be put on the surface of furniture or carpets. Making a tower out of empty soda cans that will topple on the cat when it goes after a certain area can make a cat fearful of approaching a location after several spills. Inflated balloons can be affixed over a thumbtack that is attached to a piece of cardboard. The balloon can be baited with cat food and when the cat nudges the balloon it will pop. Again, this will hopefully create an aversion to the location. The trick is to create an aversion that will be in place whether you are present or not. If you plan to get rid of a piece of furniture that has been used as a scratching post, keep the upholstery. It has the cat's scent on it and may lure the cat to a scratching post if used as a cover. If you are going to use behavior modification, give yourself at least a month or so to see if you are making process.

The bond between a person and their cat is going to be strongest when there are fewer worries about problems in the household. Many times people are more committed to their pets and will provide better care when they are not causing damage to the home. Nobody likes declawing, but sometimes it is the only option to keeping a cat in the household.

Because the back claws are necessary for cats to defend themselves, we only declaw the front feet. The nail grows from tissue on the last bone of the toe. Because of this we remove the entire bone so that the nail will not grow back. The bone that is removed is crescent shape and it rocks to absorb the concussion of the gait. When we remove that bone, the straight bone behind it absorbs the concussion of jumping and running. Most cats do well with the declawing procedure, but sometimes that straight bone is bruised by activity and the foot is uncomfortable after the surgery. The body eventually cushions this area. Most cats are moving around without discomfort after a couple of weeks. There are some cats however (and they are very few), that will have discomfort with their feet off and on for several months.

Another option to declawing is a product called Soft Paws. Soft Paws are plastic caps that are glued over the nails. We show you how to apply them with an initial office visit, you then return as needed for new kits, usually once a month. We feel that they work best for short-term protection. The caps can come off one at a time. The cat, of course, will still be scratching things and some damage can still be done. You will need to be watchful even though you are using this product.

We hope that this information will be helpful to you in making your decision about dealing with your cat's clawing. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to ask.