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### What do veterinarians say about declawing?

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association recognizes declawing as an option for cats that would otherwise be given away or euthanized (put to sleep).

The American Veterinary Medical Association accepts declawing when the owner has been unable to train the cat not to scratch.

The Australian Veterinary Association does not accept declawing unless the only alternative is euthanasia (putting the cat to sleep).

In Europe declawing is only permitted for medical reasons such as a tumour on the toe.

The World Small Animal Veterinary Association discourages operations such as declawing that are performed to modify the appearance of a companion animal for non-medical reasons.



**Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre**  
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# Declawing



## What is declawing?

Declawing is the surgical removal of a cat's claws. It is normally done on the front feet only. The surgery involves removing the last bone of the cat's toe, and is the same as removing the last section of your finger.

## Why is declawing an issue?

Declawing causes pain and is a radical way to deal with a normal cat behaviour — scratching. Owners choose declawing to prevent scratching of household items, to decrease the need to punish scratching, and to prevent injury to people and animals. However, scratching is normal for cats. They scratch because:

- Scratching removes the sheath from the claws to make room for new claw growth.
- Scratching is a form of communication. It visually marks an area and leaves behind scent from the glands located between the cat's toes.
- Cats love to stretch and scratching is part of this behaviour.

Some owners believe declawing will stop their cat from preying on birds, climbing trees, or wanting to scratch.

Declawing does **not** stop these behaviours, although it may reduce them.



## What are the risks of declawing?

The **medical risks** include excessive bleeding, infection, exposure of the remaining bone of the toe, and the risks of anaesthesia. Some cats may feel "phantom pain" in their feet for the rest of their lives — the brain detects pain in the claws even though the claws are no longer there.

There are **behavioural risks** of declawing. After declaw surgery, cats may stop using the litter box even if soft litter is provided. Some cats may dislike having their feet touched. Declawed cats may be unable to walk comfortably which may reduce their normal activities.

A **safety risk** of declawing in outdoor cats is that they no longer have claws to defend themselves, or to help them climb to safety.

## What are the alternatives to declawing?

There are options for cat owners who wish to control their cat's scratching behaviour.

### Work with your cat's behaviour and the environment

Watch to see if your cat prefers to scratch a horizontal surface like a carpet or a vertical one like the arm of a couch. Design or buy a sturdy scratching surface such as a post or mat, made of material like hemp or wood. It should be stable and long so that the cat can stretch while scratching. Place the post or other surface in the cat's favorite location such as near a sleeping area, and sprinkle it with catnip, available in your local pet store. When the cat scratches the post, reward him/her with a pat or a treat. Discourage inappropriate scratching with a firm "No!" or a squirt from a water pistol. When no one is home, close off areas where you don't want the cat to scratch. Use double-face tape to protect the corners or legs of furniture.

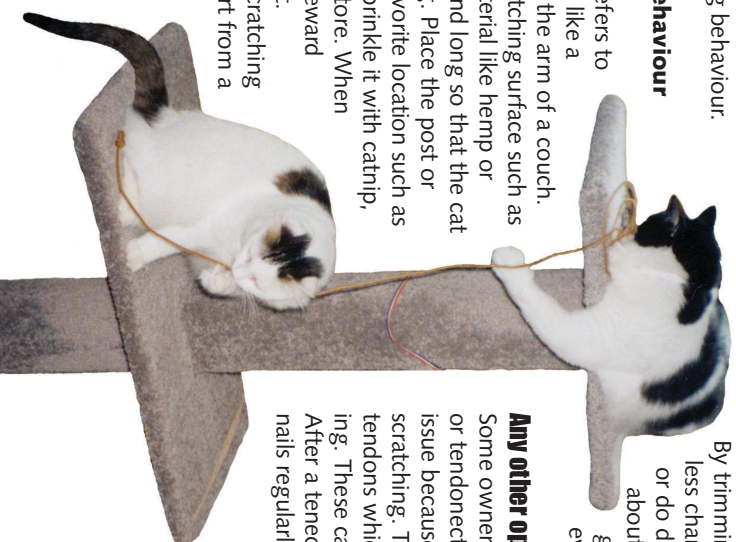


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Nail trimming

Kittens can begin scratching when they are less than a month old, so provide a scratching post right from the beginning.

### Trim your cat's nails

Ask your veterinarian to show you how to do this. By trimming the nails every few weeks, there is less chance that scratching will harm anyone, or do damage. You can also ask your vet about plastic nail caps. These coverings are glued to each nail and are replaced every 6 to 12 weeks as the nails grow.

### Any other options?

Some owners choose a surgery called tenectomy or tendonectomy. Like declawing, tenectomy is an issue because it is a radical way to deal with scratching. The surgery removes part of the tendons which control the claws during scratching. These cats may develop arthritis later on. After a tenectomy, owners must still trim the cat's nails regularly.