

DECLAWING

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OVERVIEW

Declawing (onychectomy) is an elective surgical procedure in which the nail and last bone are removed from all of the toes of a cat's front feet, and occasionally the rear feet as well. It is performed to make your cat unable to scratch furniture, people or other animals. Because cats seldom use their rear claws to scratch furniture it is generally recommended that only the front claws be removed. Additionally, cats that have only their front claws removed can still climb trees and claw with their rear limbs to protect themselves.

Alternatives to declawing include:

- Behavior modification
- Regular nail clipping to keep the nails blunt
- Glued-on vinyl nail caps replaced every 6 to 8 weeks
- Cutting of the flexor tendon in each toe to prevent extension of the nails into a scratching position

VETERINARY CARE

Most declawing procedures are performed on young healthy cats and extensive pre-operative work-up is not usually necessary. General anesthesia is typically required for this surgery.

SURGERY AND POSTOPERATIVE CARE

There are several methods for performing the procedure, but the goal is the same: complete removal of the third phalanx (last bone in the toe) and the nail that grows from it. Using a laser to perform the declaw is becoming more popular. This may be a less painful option and your cat's toes may have less bleeding afterwards.

Bleeding may occur from the incision after surgery, thus the feet are often bandaged for one to two days following the procedure. Postoperative pain is anticipated and patient is treated with pain killers (analgesics) and/or local anesthetics.

HOME CARE

Lameness or limping may persist for several weeks after surgery.

Regrowth of the nail indicates the nail bed was incompletely removed during surgery and your cat will need to have a repeat surgery performed to remove the residual nail bed and claw.

It is recommended that your cat not be allowed outside after this procedure because he will be less able to defend himself from other animals.

Shredded paper is usually used in the litter box for two weeks after surgery to prevent litter from getting into the incisions. Yesterdays News® is a brand of cat litter that can also be used. It is made from recycled newspapers.

Your cat should be monitored for persistence or recurrence of lameness.

Your veterinarian should be notified if any discharge or bleeding begins once your cat returns home.