

What every Feline Family should know:

Declaw – no easy decision

Permanently removing your cat's front claws – or declawing -- is done to reduce the effects of scratching on furniture, or on people and other pets. Declawing is optional and should NEVER be considered a standard procedure. **Instead, if you are considering this surgical procedure, make an informed decision only after you have gathered the necessary facts and information.**



Why do cats scratch?

Scratching is natural for cats. Just as they mark with their chins, cats scratch to leave their scent. But when done in a home environment, this natural behavior can become destructive.

Are there options to declaw?

Yes. But be persistent; it will take some time for kitty to learn new behaviors.

- Try "Soft Paws" plastic nail coverings that are glued over the claws; replace monthly.
- Trim nails regularly.
- Purchase cat scratching posts. (Cats CAN be trained to use them!)
- Cover unacceptable scratching areas with a less appealing material (i.e., plastic, foil).
- Try training techniques that discourage scratching: a quick squirt from a water gun, apply double-sided sticky tape to furniture or use "Scat Mats" that make a noise when jumped on.

Which cats should NOT be declawed?

Cats that spend a substantial amount of time outdoors should not be declawed since their nails are important for defense and climbing to escape predators. Older cats, especially if overweight, tend to heal slower with a longer recovery time, making them poor declaw candidates.

When is the best time to declaw?

If you decide that declaw is right for your cat, we recommend that it be done when your cat is young (3-4 pounds) since this means faster healing, less pain and reduced risk of behavioral issues. When cats are young, their paws contain more cartilage than bone making the procedure less painful. **We recommend AGAINST declaw at the same time as spay or neuter** since your cat will have to remain under anesthesia for too long.

What should I know about declaw?

Under anesthesia, an incision is made around each toe to extract the claw, nail bed and last knuckle. Cats should be hospitalized for several days for rest, observation and pain management. If you are considering declaw:

1. Choose a highly skilled veterinarian. Cats will experience substantial pain if the procedure is performed improperly.
2. Ask about pain management -- before and during surgery.
3. Ask about a pre-surgical exam and tests to determine your cat's health and ability to undergo surgery.
4. Request monitoring during surgery to reduce risk.
5. Ask which surgical technique will be used. Clippers offer little precision and are the least preferred method. There are two forms of scalpel: 1) laser and 2) traditional. Each has the same recovery time and amount of discomfort. Lasers can result in burned tissue and delayed healing, especially if performed by an inexperienced operator. [Some research indicates that there is no significant difference in recovery time between the two forms.](#)

Cats often hide their discomfort making it difficult to tell if your pet is in pain. Effective pain management is essential to your cat's health and wellbeing. Find out how to spot signs that your cat may be hurting along with options for treatment in ***Recognizing & treating pain in your cat*** available from The Cat Practice.



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What every Feline Family should know:

Recognizing & treating pain in your cat



Today there is no reason for any pet to be in pain. Studies show that, in pets, even short-term pain, left untreated, leads to increased pain sensitivity, anxiety and fear. Chronic or persistent pain can delay healing, reduce appetite and activity level, compromise your pet's immune system and affect your cat's overall health and wellbeing.

NEVER try to treat your cat's pain with over-the-counter human pain medications (such as Tylenol), which can be fatal to cats.

Cats often hide their pain

Tolerance for pain varies among cats. The best way to tell if your cat is in pain is to become familiar with what is "normal" behavior. Take note of eating habits, activity, sleep habits, litter box use and other behaviors. This will help you more easily spot changes. Like many animals, cat often hide their pain since it's a signal to other predators that they are weak and vulnerable. Get to know the warning signs that your pet may be in pain:

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|  Changes in eating habits or loss of appetite | Change in patterns of movement |
|  Withdrawal or hiding from human contact | Lack of activity or lethargy |
|  Sitting on top of paws | Sensitivity to touch |
|  Spending more time in the litter box than usual | Licking and biting at a particular area of his/her body |
|  Crying out or whimpering | |

Causes of pain in cats

Cats can be in pain following an injury or trauma. Illnesses and conditions such as bladder infections, joint problems, stomach problems, arthritis or tooth decay can all cause your cat significant pain. Serious illnesses like cancer can cause chronic or constant pain. Cats can also experience pain while recovering from surgery and other medical procedures.

Treating feline pain

If your cat has a medical condition such as tooth decay or a urinary tract infection, **treating the underlying condition and cause of the pain should relieve your cat's discomfort.** Your veterinarian will prescribe feline pain medication along with medication to treat the underlying medical condition. If your cat is in chronic pain, as a result of an ongoing condition such as arthritis, your veterinarian will recommend a pain management program specific to your cat's needs.



Often a multi-modal approach to pain management is recommended. This might include:

- Pain medication specifically for your feline.
- Alternative therapies such as massage and acupuncture. (Ask your veterinarian if this might be beneficial to your cat.)
- Herbal remedies.
- Accommodating your cat by making litter boxes and food dishes easier to reach, putting things on one floor so your cat doesn't have to climb stairs, using ramps and steps to reduce jumping, and creating a quiet, stress free environment.

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