

Effective alternatives to declawing housecats

February 27 2014, by Jennifer Dimas

As many pet owners know, cats like to scratch – and this natural behavior can result in shredded furniture and other troubles. For many years, cats were routinely declawed to prevent such problems, but the tide is turning on this surgical procedure as a growing number of people begin to question it.

In fact, some debate is rising over whether declawing should be deemed illegal in Colorado. Although no other state has completely outlawed declawing, more than 20 other countries have banned the practice.

The American Veterinary Medical Association advises that declawing of [domestic cats](#) – called onychectomy – should be considered only after attempts have been made to prevent cats from using their claws destructively, or when clawing presents a health risk for owners.

Why the concern over onychectomy? It is surgical amputation of end bones of the cat's toes. Declawing removes not only claw, but bone. It is not a procedure we, as veterinarians at Colorado State University, choose to perform without careful thought.

Up to three-fourths of cats entering animal shelters in the United States are euthanized for a variety of reasons. Cats are relinquished most commonly because their owners are moving or because of unwanted behavior – including missing the litter box, called inappropriate elimination; aggression between animals in the house; and destructive behavior, usually clawing in the wrong spot.

How can we help avoid declawing or relinquishment?

First, it's helpful to know that scratching is a [natural behavior](#). It conditions the claws by removing aged cuticle; serves as a visual and scent territorial marker; provides defense from attack; and stretches the muscles of the limbs, thorax, and back.

Here are some ways to redirect scratching and to prevent damage from the behavior:

Train your kitten to a scratching post

Food and toy rewards will encourage your cat to scratch on the post rather than on your couch. The ideal post depends on the cat. Some cats prefer upright or vertical posts, while others prefer horizontal surfaces. Some prefer soft surfaces, like carpet, while others like sisal. All cats prefer their posts to be in a main living area, and the more scratched up, the better.

Trim nails

If you don't know how to clip cat nails, ask your [veterinarian](#). Kittens can be trained to this procedure with rewards and a little patience. Ideally, trim a few claws at a time after a good play session.

Discourage scratching

If you don't like kitty's favorite scratching spot, make it less attractive. Consider using double-sided tape or feline facial pheromone spray to make the surface less attractive. Your veterinarian may have other suggestions.

Create fun in the house

Cats like fun and challenging environments. To accomplish this, use tactics such as hiding meals, providing multiple levels for play, and visually stimulating your kitty. That will help keep your cat entertained and out of trouble. The Indoor Pet Initiative website is a great source for creating the perfect home for you and your pet: [cats/](https://indoorpet.osu.edu/cats/)
target="_blank">indoorpet.osu.edu/[cats/](https://indoorpet.osu.edu/cats/).

Use plastic nail caps

Vinyl nail caps, which are temporarily attached to the [claws](#) with nontoxic glue, may be another option. These caps are sold under the brand Soft Paws and Soft Claws.

You veterinarian might have other suggestions to provide alternatives to declawing.

More information:

www.avma.org/News/JAVMANews/Pages/030415c.aspx.

Provided by Colorado State University

Citation: Effective alternatives to declawing housecats (2014, February 27) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-02-effective-alternatives-declawing-housecats.html>

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