

Declawing is a surgical procedure performed to prevent injury to other cats and people and to prevent damage to furniture. Generally, only the front claws are removed, so the animal can still climb and defend itself, although it is recommended that the cat remain indoors for added safety.

Before deciding to declaw your cat you could try to teach your cat not to scratch. One easy way is to provide him with a scratching post and show him how to use it. Some sprays and other products such as 'Feliway' and catnip can be used to attract your cat to the scratching post. You can discourage him from scratching furniture by using a citrus smelling spray on the things you don't want the cat to scratch.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE DECLAWING PROCEDURE

1. Frequent trimming to avoid sharp hooks responsible for most of the damage. Your veterinarian or technician can show you how to perform this simple procedure at home.
2. Application of small protective nails called "soft paws" over each nail. This needs to be repeated as needed as the nails are growing, and can be performed at the veterinary hospital, or alternatively, you can purchase kits to do this at home.
3. Taking steps to keep the cat away from easily damaged furniture, draperies, wallpaper, etc.

The declaw operation should not be performed solely to limit the danger from an aggressive cat, as he will rapidly learn to use his teeth as an equally effective weapon.

If you do decide that removal of the front claws is a better solution for existing or potential problems, please arrange for a surgery day with your veterinary hospital. Your cat will be in the hospital for two days after the operation. The surgery involves a general anesthetic and the amputation of the end of each toe at the first joint. The sites are then closed using tissue glue and the paws may be bandaged for 24-48 hours.



Declawing Cats

There are several potential complications that may occur following the surgery:

Pain. As with any surgery, all cats experience some degree of pain following the procedure. This lasts from days to weeks depending on the age, activity level, attitude and weight of the cat. A 'patch' is applied on the skin of the cat's back, which permits the slow release of pain medication for 3 to 4 days following the procedure. As well, oral pain medication is dispensed for a minimum of 3 days. More medication can be dispensed if needed.

Lameness. Many cats are lame following the surgery for a variable period of time. Persistent lameness is not expected and indicates the cat should be re-examined.

Bleeding. Bleeding can occur after the cat has jumped down from a height. The force of the landing will sometimes open the incision and cause bleeding. If the bleeding does not resolve on its own and/or the incisions have been opened, re-gluing of the incision will be required.

Infection. Because of the site of the surgery being close to the ground, it is relatively easy for bacteria to get into the incisions. Swelling of the toes, discharge, increased lameness, decreased appetite, or lethargy are all signs of a problem and your cat should be rechecked. It is likely that antibiotics will be needed to help clear up the problem.

Reopening of incisions and/or failure to heal.

The surgical sites may be reopened by trauma or excessive licking. The sites may fail to heal if there is infection, excessive licking by the cat or a reaction to the glue used. These problems may require an anesthetic and surgical cleanup of the edges of the sites before they will heal.

Radial Nerve Damage. Nerve damage, although rare, can occur following a declaw procedure. The damage results in paralysis of the forearm and the inability to walk on the paw properly. The paralysis can last as little as 24 hours or could last several weeks. However, there is always the possibility that the paralysis is permanent.

Changes in behavior or posture. Behavior changes have been reported in some purebred cats but are rare in the general cat population. Declawing changes the anatomy of a cat's foot so they often experience pain after they've healed, which can lead them to stop using the litter box and develop other behaviour issues. Posture changes can result following a declaw procedure due to pain and shifting of the weight to the hind legs or due to loss of the digital flexor tendons.

While all efforts are made to avoid complications before, during and after surgery, they may occur, resulting in additional costs and trips to the hospital.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call the Embrun Veterinary Hospital and speak to a veterinarian or technician.

