

AAHA Position Statement: Declawing

The American Animal Hospital Association strongly opposes the declawing of domestic cats and supports veterinarians' efforts to educate cat owners and provide them with effective alternatives.

Scratching is a normal feline behavior. Cats scratch to (1) condition their claws by removing old nail sheaths, (2) scent mark objects with the glands on their paws, (3) visually mark objects by leaving shredded matter as evidence, (4) stretch and exercise their forelegs, and (5) enjoy a pleasant sensation. Veterinarians must help cat owners to promote appropriate scratching behaviors by advising them to:

- Provide suitable implements for normal scratching behavior. Examples include scratching posts, cardboard boxes, lumber or logs, and carpet or fabric remnants affixed to stationary objects. Implements should be tall or long enough to allow full stretching, and be firmly anchored to provide necessary resistance to scratching.
- Place appropriate scratching objects near scratched furniture and make them more attractive than the furniture. Additionally, place scratching objects near resting areas so the cat can stretch and scratch after resting.
- Train cats through positive reinforcement (e.g., treats, use of catnip, verbal praise, etc.) to use the above implements.
- Trim cats' nails every one to two weeks.
- Consider artificial nail caps.
- Avoid harm to themselves or cats by avoiding engaging in rough play.

Veterinarians are obliged to provide cat owners with complete education about declawing. The following points are the foundation for full understanding and disclosure regarding declawing:

- Declawing is not just removal of the claw; it is a major surgery involving amputation.
- Declawing is rarely a medically necessary procedure. There are inherent risks and complications with any surgical procedure, including, but not limited to, anesthetic complications, side effects associated with analgesics, hemorrhage, infection, and pain.
- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not list declawing as a means of preventing disease in either healthy or immunocompromised individuals.

Declawing may warrant consideration as an alternative to relinquishment or euthanasia, but only after extensive education and presentation of other strategies to manage scratching behavior. Many declawed cats are still relinquished to shelters - declawing does not guarantee that cats will remain in households.

This statement does not apply to claw removal when medically necessary to treat conditions such as tumors or chronic infections. If declawing is performed, the procedure must follow current best practices for amputation including multi-modal pain control before, during, and for an appropriate length of time after the surgery.

AAHA believes the current data regarding behavioral issues following declaw is insufficient and will evaluate new scientific information as it becomes available.

*Adopted by the American Animal Hospital Association Board of Directors, October 2003.
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