



## Declawing in Cats

### ***How do I decide if I should declaw my cat?***

Declawing (onychectomy) consists of surgical removal of the entire nail and nail bed of the front claws under general anesthesia. In some homes, the issue comes down to the options of removing the cat from the home or having it declawed. In one study it was estimated that as many as 50% of cat owners who declawed their cats would not have otherwise kept their cat. This might be the case where the cat continues to damage the furniture, or where the cat causes injuries to people during play or handling. Even the slightest scratch can have serious consequences when a member of the household suffers from an immunosuppressive disease. It might also be argued that the short term pain and discomfort of declawing (which can be minimized with appropriate attention to pain medications) may be preferable to a life of constant confinement and excessive (and unsuccessful) attempts at punishment. Although it has been estimated that approximately 25% of cats are declawed in North America, declawing is illegal in many countries outside North America.

### ***What is the effect of declawing on the cat?***

Many authors have written of dire behavioral and surgical complications of declawing, but these reports are based on myths and anecdotes. In the past few years, a number of behaviorists, pet psychologists and epidemiologists have studied the effects of declawing on the cat, the owner, and the cat-owner relationship. At least 10 scientific studies have examined the consequences of declawing on the pet and on the pet-owner relationship. These studies show that declawing does not alter the cat's behavior. In fact, cats may continue to scratch furniture after declawing, but cause no damage. There is no increase in behavior problems. Declawed cats are not at greater risk of getting bitten or injured in catfights. Owners of declawed cats report a higher number of good behaviors than the owners of clawed cats. There is some speculation about whether declawed cats might be more prone to either biting or housesoiling. In a study of biting frequency and intensity, declawed cats did not bite any more often or any more seriously than a control group of non-declawed cats. As for housesoiling, since cats might find it uncomfortable to use their litter for the first few days after declawing, it is possible that litter avoidance could arise at this time. However, close attention to litter maintenance, the use of non-adherent litters and early attention to any emerging problems are generally successful. Housesoiling problems appear to be equally common in cats that have been declawed and those that have not. Quite surprisingly the only recognized concern is a few days of post-surgical discomfort. Therefore be certain to discuss pain management options with your veterinarian prior to surgery.

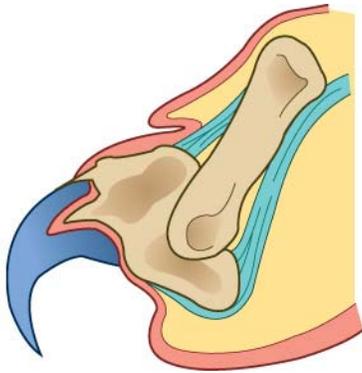
When owners of declawed cats are asked to assess the effects of declawing on the cat owner relationship, declawing always met or surpassed their expectations, and over 70% indicated an improvement in their relationship with their cat. Declawing allows people to keep their cat and stop household damage. Normally, only the front claws need to be removed to prevent furniture damage.

### ***What is a tendonectomy and how does it compare to declawing?***

Another surgery to reduce scratching is a “digital flexor tendonectomy”, in which the tendon on each claw is cut so that it cannot be used for scratching. The surgery resulted in less post-operative pain for the first two days in comparison to declawing. However, after the tendonectomy you will need to regularly trim your cat’s nails, as they will continue to grow and may catch on furniture because they will no longer be conditioned and worn down by scratching. The nails also tend to thicken abnormally and are more prone to nail bed diseases. Therefore with special attention to pain management, declawing may be the preferable surgery for owners who cannot properly maintain their cat’s nails.

### ***How is the declaw surgery performed?***

Declawing (onychectomy) consists of surgical removal of the entire nail and nail bed of the front claws under general anesthesia. At Grace Animal Hospital, we use a CO2 surgical laser to perform the procedure, considered the most current and humane method of declawing your cat. The incision sites are closed using surgical skin adhesive, and most cats and kittens are playing and climbing the same evening. Often, the patient will be hospitalized for one or two nights. Anti-inflammatories and mild pain medication may be prescribed for five to seven days after surgery. Most cats are “back to normal” within a week.



### ***How should I take care of my cat after the surgery?***

To ensure a safe and speedy recovery for your cat, follow these guidelines:

#### **➤ Litter Box**

Replace the normal granular litter with shredded strips of paper or a specially formulated dust-free pelleted litter for the first five to seven days. We provided a bag of “Yesterday’s News”

pelleted litter for your cat after discharge. If your pet refuses to use this litter, you may add one-quarter ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ) cup of regular clay litter that has been shaken to remove any clay dust. NEVER USE CLUMPING LITTER during this period. This is important because small granules of litter can enter or adhere to the surgical sites and cause an infection or delay healing.

➤ **Exercise**

Restricting a cat's activity is difficult, at best. As much as possible, discourage your cat from jumping on furniture and counter tops for the first week after surgery by blocking the access to these areas. If you see your cat on a counter top or high furniture, help it down. Cats primarily use their back legs to jump up, but may injure the surgical sites when they jump down and land on their front paws.

➤ **Bleeding**

Occasionally a cat will break open one of its incisions and a few drops of blood may ooze out. The blood should clot rapidly and form a small scab. Notify the hospital if you observe continuous bleeding from a surgical site. Do not attempt to clean the paws or administer any topical medications without consulting your veterinarian.

***Are there any negative aspects to declawing my cat?***

After declawing, it is advisable to keep your cat indoors. Over 10 scientific studies have shown that declawed cats are NOT at greater risk of getting bitten or injured in a cat fight. However, they may have a decreased ability to defend themselves against other predators if allowed outdoors.

**DISCHARGE INSTRUCTIONS AFTER LASER DECLAW SURGERY**

- Give and finish all medications as prescribed.
- Limit activity, especially jumping, as much as possible for 5 days after surgery
- Some mild discomfort and limping may occur a few days after surgery as surgical glue may be extruded from the incisions. This is temporary and similar to walking with a small pebble in a shoe

You should contact Grace Animal Hospital if any of the following occur:

- Your cat's feet appear very swollen or bleed frequently and profusely.
- Your pet is reluctant to walk after four to five (4-5) days at home.
- There is a change in your cat's general health, behavior or if your cat stops eating for two consecutive days.
- If you have any questions or concerns about your cat or the surgical procedure call us at **808-7387**. If you have questions or concerns after business hours call either of the local veterinary emergency clinics:
  - **South Carolina Veterinary Emergency Care (Harbison Area) 798-3837**
  - **Lexington Veterinary Emergency Care (Lexington, across from Uno's) 359-3199**

**ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS**