

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, wood, 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, and/or hormone attractants) to use the above implements.
- Trim cats' nails often, potentially every one to two weeks.
- Consider artificial nail caps.
- Avoid harm to themselves or cats by avoiding engaging in rough play. Owner's should not use their own body parts (feet, hands) as play toys
- Using furniture protectors as needed to deter unwanted scratching.

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 of the third bone in the toe.
- 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.

Recent retrospective studies have found significant increase (three to seven times more likely) of the following in declawed compared to non-declawed cats: chronic back pain, inappropriate urination, biting and overgrooming.

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.

Adopted by the American Animal Hospital Association Board of Directors October 2003. Revised October 2009 and August 2015. Last revised June 2021.

I have read the above Position Statement of the American Animal Hospital Association, of which, Roanoke Animal Hospital is a member.

Name

Date