

## Claws or No Claws? The Truth About De-Clawing

### TRUTHS AND ALTERNATIVES TO DECLAWING...

In modern day veterinary care, the practice of declawing cats has become far too common an alternative to training a cat with scratching issues. What many people don't realize is how severe, traumatizing and effectively life-changing Feline Digital Amputation (or "Onychectomy") really is to a cat. It can change your cat's entire personality and lead to psychological and behavioral complications later.

Training a cat with scratching issues is very possible and takes some understanding on the part of the owner as to why it is happening and how to approach adjusting the behavior. Get a great start by reading this Cat Scratching article by Karen L. Overall, MA, VMD, Ph.D.

There is also a list of very helpful Scratching Deterrents here. If you need additional information, feel free to contact Kitty City NM anytime.

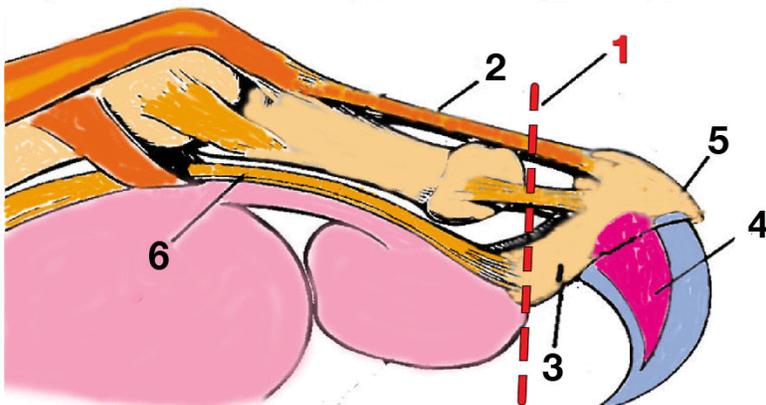
### THE FACTS ABOUT DECLAWING

(Feline Digital Amputation - "Onychectomy")

### What You Really Need to Know

Understanding Declawing (Onychectomy)

#### ***Onychectomy: "Declawing" – Feline Digital Amputation***



- 1. Line of Amputation**      3. Third Phalanx      5. Ungual Crest  
**2. Dorsal Ligaments**      4. Ungual Process      6. Flexor Tendon

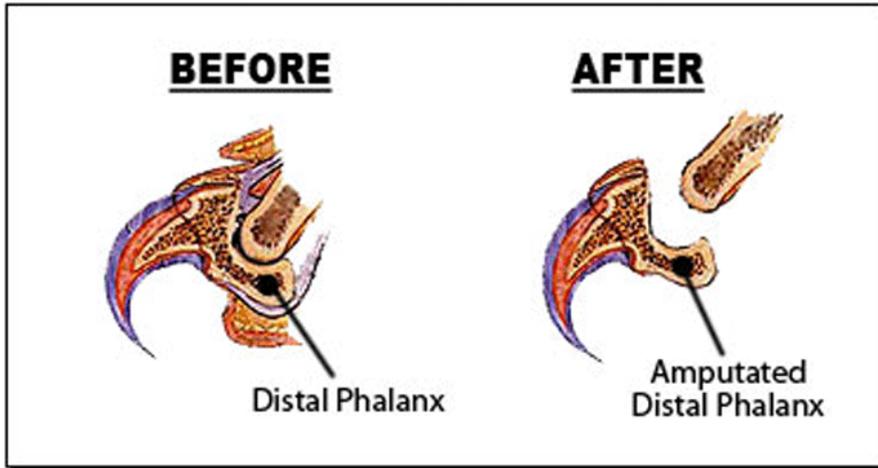
*All components are severed and/or amputated in TEN separate and painful procedures. Onychectomy is NOT simply removing the 'nail'.*

The anatomy of the feline claw must be understood before one can appreciate the severity of declawing. The cat's claw is not a nail as is a human fingernail, it is part of the last bone (distal phalanx) in the cat's toe. The cat's claw arises from the unguicular crest and unguicular process in the distal phalanx of the paw (see diagram). Most of the germinal cells that produce the claw are

situated in the dorsal aspect of the unguinal crest. This region must be removed completely, or re-growth of a vestigial claw and abscessation results. The only way to be sure all of the germinal cells are removed is to amputate the entire distal phalanx at the joint.

Contrary to most people's understanding, declawing consists of amputating not just the claws, but the whole phalanx (up to the joint), including bones, ligaments, and tendons! To remove the claw, the bone, nerve, joint capsule, collateral ligaments, and the extensor and flexor tendons must all be amputated.

Thus declawing is not a “simple”, single surgery but 10 separate, painful amputations of the third phalanx up to the last joint of each toe. A graphic comparison in human terms would be the cutting off of a person's finger at the last joint of each finger.



**Misleading Information**

Many vets and clinic staff deliberately misinform and mislead clients into believing that declawing removes only the claws in the hopes that clients are left with the impression

that the procedure is a "minor" surgery comparable to spay/neuter procedures and certainly doesn't involve amputation (partial or complete) of the terminal-toe bone, ligaments and tendons. Some vets rationalize the above description by saying that since the claw and the third phalanx (terminal toe bone) are so firmly connected, they simply use the expression "the claw" to make it simpler for clients to "understand". Other vets are somewhat more honest and state that if they used the word "amputation", most clients would not have the surgery performed! Onychectomy in the clinical definition involves either the partial or total amputation of the terminal bone. That is the only method. What differs from vet to vet is the type of cutting tool used (guillotine-type cutter, scalpel or laser).



## **Psychological & Behavioral Complications**

Some cats are so shocked by de-clawing that their personalities change. Cats who were lively and friendly have become withdrawn and introverted after being declawed. Others, deprived of their primary means of defense, become nervous, fearful, and/or aggressive, often resorting to their only remaining means of defense, their teeth. In some cases, when declawed cats use the litterbox after surgery, their feet are so tender they associate their new pain with the box...permanently, resulting in a life-long aversion to using the litter box. Other declawed cats that can no longer mark with their claws, they mark with urine instead resulting in inappropriate elimination problems, which in many cases, results in relinquishment of the cats to shelters and ultimately euthanasia. Many of the cats surrendered to shelters are surrendered because of behavioral problems which developed after the cats were declawed.



### **Risk factors for relinquishment of cats to an animal shelter:**

Among 218 cats relinquished to a shelter, more (52.4%) declawed cats than non-declawed cats (29.1%) were reported by owners to have inappropriate elimination problems."

Source: World Small Animal Veterinary Association - 2001

The incidence of behavior problems following onychectomy in cats; two months to five years (median 11.5 months) after surgery:

33% developed at least one behavior problem.

17.9% had an increase in biting habits or intensity.

15.4% would not use the litter box.

Source: World Small Animal Veterinary Association - 2001

## **Declawing can cause a constant state of stress:**

Many declawed cats become so traumatized by this painful mutilation that they end up spending their maladjusted lives perched on top of doors and refrigerators, out of reach of real and imaginary predators against whom they no longer have any adequate defense.

A cat relies on its claws as its primary means of defense. Removing the claws makes a cat feel defenseless. The constant state of stress caused by a feeling of defenselessness may make some declawed cats more prone to disease. Stress leads to a myriad of physical and psychological disorders including suppression of the immune system, cystitis and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

