

The Vinton-Urbana Veterinary Hospital Position Statement on Declawing Cats

We at the Vinton-Urbana Veterinary Hospital follow the position statements of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA), The American Association of Feline Practitioners, and the ASPCA.

Scratching is a normal feline behavior. It is a means for cats to mark their territory both visually and with scent and is used for claw conditioning and stretching activity. It is important for cat owners to understand that scratching is a normal behavior and that it **can be directed to areas that owners consider appropriate.** The following steps should be taken to prevent destructive clawing and are alternatives to declawing:

1. Owners should provide suitable implements for normal scratching behavior such as scratching posts, cardboard boxes, and lumber on logs. Many cats prefer vertical scratching posts, long enough or tall enough to allow full stretching, and firmly anchored to provide necessary resistance to scratching. Scratching material preferred by most cats are wood, sisal rope, and rough fabric. Since cats often stretch and scratch upon awakening, the posts should be placed next to where the cat sleeps. Kittens and cats can be trained to scratching posts, by enticing the cat to the post with catnip, treats or toys, and rewarding behavior near or on the scratching post. If the cat scratches elsewhere, the cat should be picked up gently and taken to the scratching post, and then rewarded. Cats should be positively reinforced and never punished.
2. Appropriate claw care includes **trimming the claws** to prevent injury or undesired damage to household items. Proper utensils should be used to prevent splintering of the nails. Frequency of nail trimming varies, but may be as frequent as every 1-2 weeks in kittens. Trim nails in a calm environment, with positive reinforcement for the cat.
3. Temporary synthetic nail caps (Soft Paws) are available as an alternative to onychectomy to prevent human injury or damage to property. Plastic nail caps are usually applied every 4-6 weeks.

Declawing, or onychectomy, is the amputation of the last digital bone, including the nail bed and claw. Although with newer surgical techniques and different pain modulation techniques the initial disadvantages of declawing are still obvious:

1. The need for another surgical procedure, anesthesia, and extra pain medication.
2. The possibility of post-operative complications

Sometimes the bigger concern lies in the future of the cat.

1. Consider what will happen if the cat escapes outdoors.
2. The inability to protect itself against other predators and young family members
 - a. Without the front claws for defense ***many cats will start biting.***
 - b. Some cats will show other displays of anxiety by urinating on inappropriate things or on furniture – the leading cause for which cats are relinquished or put outside.
3. Long-term physical problems such as arthritis in the remaining digital joints as they age – ***especially in overweight cats.***

Therefore, we at the Vinton-Urbana Veterinary Hospital are strongly opposed to declawing cats for the convenience of their guardians.

As stated in our veterinary oath, it is our duty to protect your pet's health – not your furniture.