



## **HSCC Policy Statement: Declawing**

**Position:** The Humane Society of Chittenden County is opposed to the declawing of any cat, regardless of age, on the grounds that it subjects the cat to unnecessary pain, suffering, and stress. The procedure may also lead to inappropriate and unacceptable behavior such as biting, marking, and failure to use the litter box. We are committed to educating the public and potential adopters about the facts of the surgical procedure and informing them of the many alternatives to this action.

**Definition:** Declawing (onychectomy) is a surgical procedure in which the entire last digit of a cat's toe(s) is amputated. This is comparable to severing a human being's finger at the last joint. The operation can result in a prolonged and painful recovery period, during which the cat must walk, stand, and use the litterbox regardless of her/his discomfort.

### **Consequences:**

- It is important to note that cats are digitigrade- they walk on their toes. Declawing can cause their feet to hit the ground at an unnatural angle, which may result in the misalignment of their leg, shoulder and back muscles, and joints.
- Declawing deprives cats of their innate instinct to mark territory. Cats have glands in their paws that release a scent undetectable to people, which accompanies the visual scoring. The alternative- urine marking- is universally repugnant and very difficult to eradicate.
- Cats need to scratch in order to exercise, stretch, and to perform routine nail maintenance, such as the removal of debris and claw husks.
- Some cats associate the pain that they feel when pawing in the litterbox immediately after surgery with the box itself. This can lead to litterbox avoidance and elimination in inappropriate areas, which can be a very hard habit to break. Many declawed cats are relinquished to shelters for this very reason.
- Removing a cat's claws strips her/him of their first line of defense. A declawed cat that feels threatened will often resort to biting, resulting in potentially serious injury to both people and other animals. While some argue that declawing is a reasonable step to prevent a child from being hurt, the consequences of a bite are often far more serious than those of a scratch.
- A declawed cat that is permitted to go outdoors, or an indoor-only escapee, is at serious risk; they are less able to defend themselves, and cannot climb to a safe place if they encounter a predator.

**What you can do:**

- Provide a sturdy scratching post in several areas of the home that allows for the full extension of the cat's body. We suggest that a variety of surfaces (sisal, corrugated cardboard, carpet, and/or wood) are offered until the cat(s) indicate a favorite.
- Trim your cat's nails on a regular basis.
- Employ aversion techniques. Squirting the cat with water or making a sudden loud noise when it is caught in the act can discourage scratching. Placing tinfoil or double-sided sticky tape (available at pet supply stores) in popular spots that are difficult to monitor is also an effective deterrent.
- Use non-surgical prophylactic measures such as Soft Paws (plastic caps that are glued to the claws to prevent damage to furniture).

If, after an adopter has exhausted all the options, and still considers the cat destructive, HSCC prefers that that cat be returned to the shelter rather than undergo declaw surgery.

A potential adopter who indicates a strong preference for declawing will be encouraged to adopt a previously declawed cat that has adapted well to its physical limitations.

**References:**

Declawing.com

The American Association of Feline Practitioners

The Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights