

Scratching behaviour is a normal and natural part of a cat's existence. It is used to condition the claws, as a territorial mark, and as a mechanism for stretching and toning the back and shoulder muscles. A cat's claws are also their primary defence and provide good traction, allowing rapid acceleration and sharp turns while running and bestowing climbing ability.

To best examine the issue of declawing, it is essential to understand the procedure as it is applied in practice. First, the cat is given a general anaesthetic and the fur surrounding the cat's paws is shaved off. A tourniquet is placed around the leg, and the nail area is rinsed with alcohol. The actual amputation is performed by making a cut across the first joint (possibly involving the foot pad) using a guillotine type nail cutter. The area is then tightly bandaged to prevent haemorrhage. The bandaging can be removed two to three days after the surgery.

Two fundamental statements provide the basis for discussing this issue: First, that it is morally wrong to surgically alter any being, without his/her consent, unless for medical necessity, or to provide a health benefit when consent is impossible. Second, that all species are equal in their right to be treated with respect and compassion, thus obligating us to provide this respect and compassion to anyone under our care.

*a stance...*

Since scratching is a natural behaviour of cats, we must be prepared to accept this behaviour along with the cat. Despite the fact that most cats will use designated scratching posts when provided, we must accept that occasional damage to our material belongings may result. The solution to this is not to mutilate the cat, but to learn acceptance. If scratching is a problem for people, it is their

For many cat lovers declawing is unconscionable. Many veterinarians will not perform the procedure, it is outlawed in some countries, and there is currently no animal welfare organization that condones the practice. Despite the nonsurgical alternatives that exist, many people still view this as a preventative procedure that is necessary for a cat to be a "good pet." It is this last viewpoint that so many cat lovers find infuriating. Cats are already wonderful companions. They do not require any surgical modifications to become the companions they are known as worldwide. As many, who have authorized having their cat declawed, will freely admit, it was done to prevent damage to their furniture. Cats represent a living, thinking, feeling, entity; how can we ever place their welfare on the same balance as that of our furniture? Declawing is inhumane. Although, scientifically, there have been no decisive long-term studies to research the behavioural effects, declawing represents a clear and undisputable risk to the cat. No one has the right to mutilate another, for their own personal gain.

*By Scott Baker:*

A publication of:

**CENTRE for FELINE EDUCATION**

British Columbia, Canada [www.felineeducation.org](http://www.felineeducation.org)

© copyright 1997 -1999 Feline Future



Despite frequent discussion, feline *onychectomy* (declawing) remains a source of confusion for many.

This brochure will examine this controversial procedure and the implications facing a cat, on which it is performed.

Proponents of declawing defend this procedure with several common assertions:

1.) *“Declawing does nothing to harm the cat”.*

The failing of this argument is, that without question, declawing certainly increases the risk of long term harm to the cat - and most definitely causes short term harm. *Onychectomy* in cats is used by pharmaceutical companies to test pain killers, as it is one of the most painful procedures that can be performed. Just consider that it has been (and still is, in some places) used as a form of torture with humans.

The surgery, if not performed correctly, can result in many detrimental effects. Any general anaesthetic puts a living organism at risk. If the bandages are put on too tightly the foot can become gangrenous, and necessitate amputation of the leg. In many instances one or more claws will begin to regrow, causing extreme pain, or if either the trimmer is dull or the cat's nail is brittle, the bone may shatter. This is called a *sequestrum*, which becomes a sight for irritation and continuous drainage from the toe. This can only be corrected by another surgical procedure.

Some chronic, physical ailments, including *cystitis* and skin disorders have been traced to the period immediately following this surgery. Theories also suggest possible effects to the cat's weight bearing and movement kinetics.

There is no evidence either way as to the long term behavioural effects a declawed cat may or may not experience, and much anecdotal evidence exists to support both viewpoints.

However, as they have been deprived of their primary source of defence - their claws - declawed cats often resort to biting when they feel threatened. Many groomers and veterinarians agree, that declawed cats are far more difficult to handle, both because of the increased incidence of biting, and due to a lack of self confidence resulting for the loss of their favoured defence mechanism. Shelters are also often forced to euthanize declawed cats that have been surrendered because of this type of aggressive behaviour.

With all these risks, one would like to compare them to the benefit that the cat experiences - unfortunately there are none.

2.) *“If I do not declaw the cat, I would have to surrender it to the pound, and it will likely be euthanized.”*

This argument is used by many, but when considered in depth, it is simply countered with the old adage: "two wrongs don't make a right". Amputating a cat's toes is just as wrong as surrendering a cat simply because he/she no longer fits in with his/her person's lifestyle, or having a cat euthanized because it was acting as a cat should. It is easy to justify one inhumanity because it may be better than another inhumane option, but both are unnecessary, and neither is justifiable.



3.) *“How do you justify neutering if surgical alteration is supposed to be so bad; it is only done for human convenience - to avoid spraying and annoying heat periods anyway.”*

When approached from a purely logical standpoint, this becomes a difficult question.

First, one must accept that keeping companion animals is not inherently bad in itself. If this is taken as a truth, then we as humans, become responsible for the wellbeing of their species. This includes providing birth control, as is necessary to preserve the health of that species. For animals, three possible birth control options currently exist: *castration* (neutering) or *vasectomy* for males, *ovariohysterectomy* (spaying) or *tubal ligation* for females, or forced abstinence. *Castration* and *ovariohysterectomy* provides birth control, but it also shapes a cat through a surgical means to fit better into our human society, as the entire reproductive organs are removed, and the hormone flow, which governs sexual behaviour, is ceased. *Vasectomy* and *tubal ligation* provide birth control while leaving the reproductive organs as intact as possible, and therefore not altering the cat's natural behaviour. However, this alternative is not recommended for female cats due to their reproduction biology. Forced abstinence should only be chosen as a short term solution. Intact tomcats are compelled by physiological changes to mate. Forcing them not to mate causes them undue stress and discomfort. The eggs of an intact *queen* (female cat) who is not permitted to mate, and therefore can not ovulate, become encysted in her ovaries, which may lead to cancerous tumours. Unlike declawing, any form of sterilisation provides a net benefit for the feline species' and is therefore justifiable.

*Claws are an important feature of the cat's anatomy. Resources, to help deal with a cat's desire to use them, are endless.*