

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. Others 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 to shelters and ultimately euthanasia.

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 because stress suppresses the immune system.

### **Moral, Ethical and Humane Considerations**

Most people are vehemently opposed to declawing due to a combination of reasons: 1) because the end (owner convenience) doesn't justify the means (causing unnecessary pain to the cat); 2) because other, less harmful alternatives to declawing exist and 3) because claws are part of the nature or "catness" of cats. Overall, the view is that it is ethically inappropriate to remove parts of an animal's anatomy, thereby causing the animal pain, merely to fit the owner's lifestyle, aesthetics, or convenience without any benefit to the cat. It should be emphasized that "most people" includes virtually the entire adult population of Europe and many other countries around the world.

Dr. Nicholas Dodman, Professor of Behavioral Pharmacology and Director of the Behavior Clinic at Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine and internationally known specialist in domestic animal behavioral research, explains declawing:

*"The inhumanity of the procedure is clearly demonstrated by the nature of cats' recovery from anesthesia following the surgery. Unlike routine recoveries, including recovery from neutering surgeries, which are fairly peaceful, declawing surgery results in cats bouncing off the walls of the recovery cage because of excruciating pain. Cats that are more stoic huddle in the corner of the recovery cage, immobilized in a state of helplessness, presumably by overwhelming pain. Declawing fits the dictionary definition of mutilation to a tee. Words such as deform, disfigure, disjoint, and dismember all apply to this surgery. Partial digital amputation is so horrible that it has been employed for torture of prisoners of war, and in veterinary medicine, the clinical procedure serves as model of severe pain for testing the efficacy of analgesic drugs. Even though analgesic drugs can be used postoperatively, they rarely are, and their effects are incomplete and transient anyway, so sooner or later the pain will emerge."*

Declawing robs a cat of an integral means of movement and defense. Because they cannot defend themselves adequately against attacks by other animals, declawed cats who are allowed outdoors may be at increased risk of injury or death.

*"Because of post operative discomfort or pain, and potential future behavioral or physical effects, CFA disapproves of declawing or tendonectomy surgery."*

Scratching is a natural instinct for cats and declawing causes a significant degree of privation with respect to satisfying the instinctive impulses to climb, chase, exercise, and to mark territory by scratching. Cats simply enjoy scratching.

The sensible and humane solution to undesirable scratching is to modify the cat's conduct by making changes in the environment and direct the cat's natural scratching behavior to an appropriate area (e.g., scratching post) rather than surgically altering the cat, thereby causing the animal pain, merely to fit the owner's lifestyle, aesthetics, or convenience.

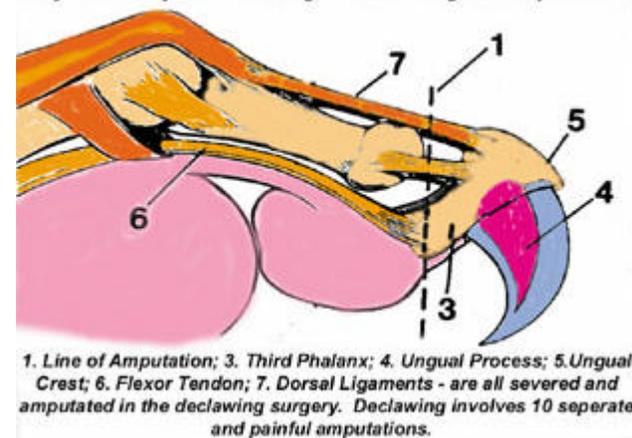
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# The Facts About "Declawing"

## What You Need To Know

Onychectomy: "Declawing" - Feline Digital Amputation

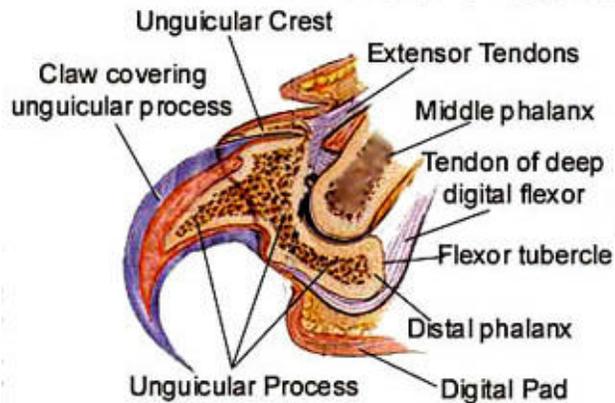


### The Cat's Claws

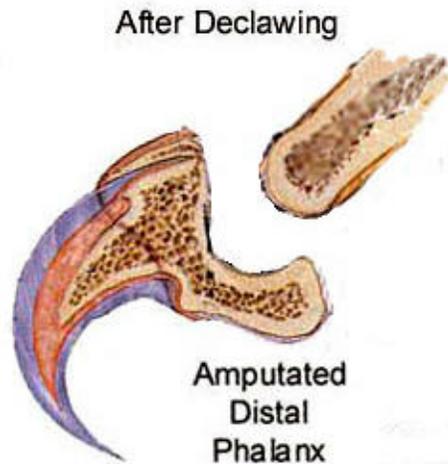
Unlike most mammals who walk on the soles of the paws or feet, cats are *digitigrade*, which means they walk on their toes. Their back, shoulder, paw and leg joints, muscles, tendons, ligaments and nerves are naturally designed to support and distribute the cat's weight across its toes as it walks, runs and climbs. A cat's claws are used for balance, for exercising, and for stretching the muscles in their legs, back, shoulders, and paws. They stretch these muscles by digging their claws into a surface and pulling back against their own clawhold - similar to isometric exercising for humans. This is the only way a cat can exercise, stretch and tone the muscles of its back and shoulders. The toes help the foot meet the ground at a precise angle to keep the leg, shoulder and back muscles and joints in proper alignment. Removal of the last digits of the toes causes the foot to meet the ground at an unnatural angle that can cause back pain similar to that in humans caused by wearing improper shoes.

## Understanding Declawing (Onychectomy)

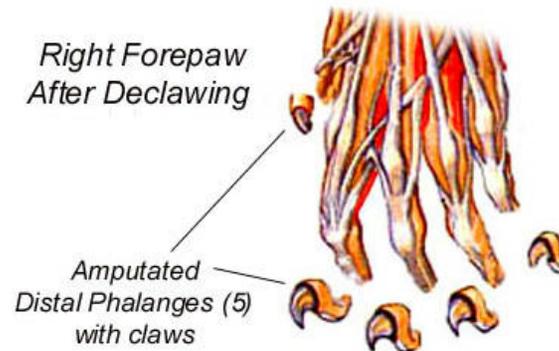
The anatomy of the feline claw must be understood before one can appreciate the severity of declawing. The cat's claw is not a nail as is a human fingernail, it is part of the last bone (*distal phalanx*) in the cat's toe. The cat's claw arises from the *unguicular crest* and *unguicular process* in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



This region must be removed completely, or regrowth 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.



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).

## Complications

Declawing is not without complication. The rate of complication is relatively high compared with other so-called routine procedures. Complications of this amputation can be excruciating pain, damage to the radial nerve, hemorrhage, bone chips that prevent healing, painful regrowth of deformed claw inside of the paw which is not visible to the eye, and chronic back and joint pain as shoulder, leg and back muscles weaken.

Other complications include postoperative hemorrhage, either immediate or following bandage removal is a fairly frequent occurrence, paw ischemia, lameness due to wound infection or foot-pad laceration, exposure necrosis of the second phalanx, and abscess associated with retention of portions of the third phalanx. Abscess due to regrowth must be treated by surgical removal of the remnant of the third phalanx and wound debridement. During amputation of the distal phalanx, the bone may shatter and cause what is called a sequestrum, which serves as a focus for infection, causing continuous drainage from the toe. This necessitates a second anesthesia and surgery. Abnormal growth of severed nerve ends can also occur, causing long-term, painful sensations in the toes. Infection will occasionally occur when all precautions have been taken.

Two recent studies published in peer-reviewed veterinary journals (*Vet Surg* 1994 Jul-Aug;23(4):274-80) concluded "Fifty percent of the cats had one or more complications immediately after surgery.... 19.8% developed complications after release." Another study (*J Am Vet Med Assoc* 1998 Aug 1;213(3):370-3) comparing the complications of declawing with Tenectomy concluded "Owners should be aware of the high complication rate for both procedures." Many cats also suffer a loss of balance because they can no longer achieve a secure foothold on their amputated stumps.

## Psychological & Behavioral Complications

Some cats are so shocked by declawing that their personalities change. Cats who were lively and friendly have become withdrawn and introverted