Should You Declaw Your Dog?

By Shelley Thayer
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A dog’s nails can cause painful scratches, scuff wooden floors and dig holes in the backyard. By declawing your dog, you will remove the threat of hurting babies, small children or the elderly. And a few ailments, such as arthritis, joint pain and lameness, are nothing compared to peace of mind... right?

WRONG! No one would ever think of declawing his or her dog. It would be out of the question, cruel and inhumane!

So, why then, are we able to turn our heads when it comes to declawing our cats?

If you have ever declawed a cat, or are thinking about it, please read this article. You owe it to yourself and, most importantly, to your cat.

Onychectomy, known as declawing, is an operation to surgically remove an animal’s claws by means of amputation of all or part of the distal phalanges, or end bones, of the animal’s toes. This alone should stop us, but it doesn’t. Why?

According to Dr. Christianne Schell- ing, “Declawing is literally maiming a cat, a mistake that can lead to physical, emotional and behavioral complications. It is erroneous to think that declawing a cat is a trivial procedure similar to trimming fingernails. A cat’s claws are a vital part of its anatomy, essential to balance, mobility and survival.” (http://www.catscratching.com/)

Potential complications of declawing include pain, post-surgical complications, joint stiffness, arthritis, litter box aversion, increased aggression, biting and death. (http://www.pawproject.com/faqs)

In fact, declawed cats can become so traumatized by this painful mutilation that they end up spending their maladjusted lives perched on top of refrigerators or other high places. With no adequate defense, they remain out of reach from real and imaginary predators.

The number one reason people give up their cats is for urination outside the box. Declawed cats with paw sensitivity issues may find it painful to use the litter box. Since declawed cats often are associated with this problem, some animal shelters are no longer admitting declawed cats into their systems.

Photo, above center: Declawing a cat is equivalent to amputating all of the fingertips of a human hand at the first knuckle. Laser surgery, often considered less evasive, still removes the entire end bone and can cause debilitating physical, emotional and behavioral complications. Photo©BigStockPhoto.com/Denis Nata
Another side effect of declawing cats is biting. Left without claws for physical stretching, play, scratching or defense, cats may take up a secondary form of resistance or aggression and use their teeth.

Scratching is not a behavioral problem, but a natural and necessary physical function. It removes the dead outer sheaths of the nail and is a vital exercise that stretches and strengthens the upper body. Cats mark their territory visually, especially in multi-cat households, as a way of determining rank. The cat’s toes have scent glands, enabling them to leave their signature by scratching. It is a source of communication, health and security.

Cats should never be declawed as a preventative measure to scratching. The majority of cats given proper scratching posts will use them. Even if a cat does develop an undesirable scratching habit, it is one of the easiest behaviors to correct.

Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association opposes surgical procedures performed on a companion animal solely for the cosmetic preference or convenience of the caregiver. This includes declawing or tendonectomy of cats.

The Humane Society of the United States, ASPCA, Best Friends Animal Society, American Humane Association, Cat Depot and leading animal shelters across the country agree that alternatives are needed to declawing cats. Veterinarians and clinics in 33 states in our nation agree, and declawing cats now is unlawful in 25 countries, including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Scotland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Wales. Here are seven simple tips to prevent a lifetime of problems for you and your cat.

• Trim nails often (start when kittens are young; use a “towel wrap” to reduce stress)
• Provide vertical and horizontal scratching posts and scratching mats
• Use double-sided sticky tape on furniture when training
• Apply SoftPaws while training
• Plug in Phermones (Feliway) or use Calming Collars
• Provide emery scratching boards
• Train your cat—yes, cats are smart!

For more information about the dangers of declawing, visit www.catdepot.org; click on “Resources. Declawing Cats.”

Photo, above, trimming your kitten or cat’s nails often minimizes clawing issues. Photo©123rf.com/Vladimir Vydrin. Photo, at left, cats can be trained to scratch posts instead of home furnishings; with patience, it is an easy behavior to correct. Photo© BigStockPhoto.com/Digidesign

Dedicated to saving lives, Cat Depot, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) free-roaming facility, is recognized for its progressive design and commitment to helping homeless, abandoned and injured animals. Open seven days a week, Cat Depot is located at 2542 17th Street in Sarasota. For more information, call 941-366-2404, or visit Cat Depot online at www.CatDepot.org.