

## Transcript:

# Declawing

Hi, this is Dr. Karen Becker, and today we're going to discuss declawing. Declawing is a surgery that involves amputating the first joint of a cat's toes. The surgery is painful, permanent, expensive, and irreversible. I believe if most cat owners really understood what was occurring during a declaw, they would never choose to do it for their pets.

First, we recognize that cats are digitigrade, which means they walk on their toes. Most other mammals like humans walk on the soles of their feet. Cat's claws are used for balance, exercising, stretching, and toning the muscles, legs, back shoulders, and paws, not to mention hunting for food as well as escaping predators and marking behavior if the cat lives outdoors.

Contrary to most people's beliefs, declawing consists of the amputation of the last phalanx, including bones, ligaments, and tendons. This is not a nail trim or nail removal; it's the removal of the claw, bone, nerve, joint capsule, collateral ligaments, and the extensor or flexor tendons. Amputation of the third phalanx or the first toe bone that houses the nail drastically alters the confirmation of the feet, which can lead to a whole host of physical complications such as chronic small bone arthritis, degenerative joint disease, and neuralgia.

But equally as devastating are the emotional complications. Commonly, post-declaw personality changes can be observed stemming from the insecurities of losing their primary instinctual defense mechanism. Cats can become nervous, fearful, and aggressive, oftentimes resorting to their last remaining means of defense, which are their teeth. Other declawed cats can no longer mark with their claws, and they use urination as a marking mechanism around the house, which can result in inappropriate elimination problems. Defenseless, most declawed cats resort to finding elevated perches like the countertop or refrigerator, versus resting confidently on the ground.

The main reason pet owners request declaws is concern over their home furnishings, and the main reason veterinarians perform them is they're afraid that owners will become abusive or neglectful if damage occurs to people's homes. Because there are a ton of risks and no actual benefits to cats themselves, the procedure has been outlawed in many European countries and is a hot topic of debate in many local jurisdictions in our country as well.

I believe in the model "Educate, don't amputate." The humane solution to undesirable scratching is providing sensible options for cats. I teach my kitten owners that cats have claws

and they'll absolutely use them. Just as I have to trim my nails weekly, you many need to end up trimming your cat's nails very frequently. In addition to weekly nail trims, I also suggest owners to provide at least two different scratching surfaces: a tall, sturdy scratching post, as well as a horizontal scratching mat. My cats prefer floor mats, as well as a log I brought in from the outside. My cats also love a commercially available cardboard paper scratcher.

In addition to providing cats an appropriate surface to scratch, cat owners need to recognize that areas cat are scratching inappropriately should be covered with either aluminum foil or double-sided tape. You could also cover your cat's nails with a commercially available nail cap to prevent furniture from being damaged.