

SCRATCHING AND DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR IN CATS

Scratching is a natural behavior that serves a variety of purposes for cats. Scratching helps to sharpen a cat's nails and removes the outer sheath as the nails grow. Cats will reach up and pull with their nails to help stretch muscles. Cats also have scent glands on the pads of their feet, so they use scratching to mark their territory. Scratching is also used in play, and as a threatening signal to other cats.

Since this behavior is so important to cats, we do not want to stop scratching. Instead, there are things you can do to encourage your cat to continue this natural behavior without causing damage to your home.

- Scratching Post – Scratching posts provide your cat an appropriate place to scratch and stretch. Look for a post with a sturdy base and multiple textures such as carpet, wood, cardboard and sisal rope to provide a variety of surfaces. Post should be tall enough for your cat to fully extend body while stretching. Place post in your cat's favorite area of home and encourage your cat to investigate by sprinkling catnip on it, hanging toys on it, and placing toys on top of it.
- Scratching Board - Scratching boards are made from corrugated cardboard and can be sprinkled with catnip and used in the same way as a scratching post. You can also find tutorials online to make your own scratching board.
- Discourage inappropriate scratching by removing or covering objects when possible. Place double sided tape, sandpaper or an upside-down vinyl carpet runner (knobby parts up) on furniture or other objects.
- If your cat is scratching furniture you can move the post in front of the item, allowing your cat to still scratch without damaging your furniture. After your cat is consistently using the post you can gradually move it to any area you prefer.
- Clipping nails - Clipping your cats nails every few weeks can help to prevent damage caused by sharp nails.
- Plastic nail covers - Nail covers are temporary plastic tips that are adhered to a cat's nails. They will fall off as the nail grows and must be replaced every 6-8 weeks. Your veterinarian can help you decide if this is a good option for your cat.
- Never use punishment or aversive methods to try stopping a cat from scratching. Methods such as using loud noises to startle them, spraying them with water, striking them, or other physical corrections are likely going to cause your cat to be fearful of you and could cause your cat to become aggressive. It is always best to prevent inappropriate behaviors by providing safe and acceptable outlets for your cat's natural behaviors.
- Declawing a cat is linked to causing other, more severe, behavior issues and is not recommended.

Understanding Declawing Cats

Declawing a cat is often seen as a quick and easy solution to destructive scratching. Declawing is a surgical amputation of the bones in a cat's toes. Declawing is linked to causing other, more severe, behavior issues. There are non-surgical and effective methods to deter your cat from inappropriate scratching.

What is Declawing

Declawing involves the surgical amputation of the last bone of each toe. This procedure can be done using several methods.

- Traditional methods require the use of a scalpel to amputate the last two bones in each of the cat's toes.
- Alternatively, laser surgery can be used to declaw. Laser surgery uses a small, intense beam of light to cut through tissue and amputate the last two bones.
- A third surgical procedure known as tendonectomy, severs the tendon that controls the claw in each toe. The cat keeps their claws but can't control them or extend them to scratch. This procedure requires pet owners to continue to clip a cats nails on a regular basis to prevent painful nail overgrowth.

Issues Related to Declawing

- Inappropriate litterbox use
- Biting
- Chronic pain
- Lameness
- Regrowth of improperly removed claws
- Nerve damage
- Bone Spurs

Declawing should not be viewed as a harmless way to stop a cat from scratching. It is an invasive medical procedure that can cause long lasting and often painful effects on a cat.



When to Seek Help

Scratching is a natural and important behavior to cats. The steps outlined above are designed to help you manage your cat's natural instincts in a safe and humane manner. If your cat's scratching is causing injury to themselves or others, this may be a more complex issue. In those cases, you should consult with a Certified Veterinary Behaviorist so they can evaluate your situation and develop a plan that is appropriate for you and your pet.