



ALLEY CAT RESCUE

AN ALLIANCE FOR CAT PROTECTION

P.O. BOX 98499 WASHINGTON DC 20007 • 301 277 5595 • ACR@SAVEACAT.ORG

Cats And Claws: Why You Should Not Declaw Your Cat

Cats need to scratch; it's part of their natural instinctive behavior. Scratching helps to keep cats in shape and allows them to stretch and tone their muscles.

Indoor cats sometimes scratch things we don't want them to scratch, like our sofas, beds, or other furniture. This can be upsetting to humans, since scratching can cause damage. Some people decide to declaw their cats, however, this does stop cats from scratching.

It's natural for a cat to scratch, and with a little effort, you can direct that energy so that you, your cat, *and* your furniture can comfortably live together.

Cats scratch on objects for many reasons:

1. To stretch their spine and muscles
2. To exercise
3. To mark their territory
4. To shed old claw tissue
5. To sharpen their claws
6. To alleviate boredom

Reasons Not to Declaw:

1. The surgery is extreme, removing not just the claw but also the first joint of the toe. It is painful and traumatic for the cat. While some cats do manage to adjust after this surgery, others will experience pain for years. It may cause the cat to have difficulty running fast, climbing, or jumping. Declawing can also cause litter box issues. When declawed cats dig in the litterbox it can be painful, which leads to not using the litter box. And cats who have been declawed are more likely to become "biters," since their first defense of scratching has been removed.

2. Scratching is both exercise and entertainment for your cat. Depriving your cat of the ability to scratch is a lot like telling a kid he can't ever play hide and seek or baseball again. Your cat will not be able to stretch and tone her muscles in the same way as before. She may feel bored and unhappy.

3. Scratching is a natural and instinctive behavior in cats. A declawed cat cannot understand what has happened to her and she will still attempt to scratch. She will feel frustrated when she cannot scratch or when her injured toes cause her pain. Your cat may act out her frustration in other ways, becoming destructive or crying out constantly.

4. It just isn't necessary to declaw your cat. There are plenty of other simpler, kinder ways to stop her from destroying furniture. Cat parents who choose not to declaw their cats can still save their furniture. It may take a little effort, but it is well worth it to have a happy, healthy cat and happy human.

If you feel you must have a declawed cat, consider adopting a cat who is already declawed. Millions of cats are dropped off at animal shelters every year, and they desperately need good homes. Previous caretakers have declawed many of these cats. So instead of subjecting another cat to such a terrible procedure, help out a needy cat who has already been through the surgery.

How to live with scratching:

1. Provide at least one good scratching post for your cat. An ideal scratching post should allow your cat to stretch out her entire body length. For most cats the post should be 2 and 1/2 feet tall or long. This will allow her to fully exercise her "scratching muscles." If the scratching post is too short she will look for something else to scratch, like the sofa.
2. You may wish to try placing several scratching posts in various places of your home. If your cat gets the urge to scratch, but has to go a long way to reach her scratching post, she might decide to give something else a try. Put the scratching posts where your cat can find them easily and has enough space to really stretch out.
3. Try a variety of scratching posts. Most cats like posts covered with thick carpet, which is soft but also provides resistance as they drag their claws downward. Some cats also like tough rope-covered posts, or less expensive cardboard scratching "mats."
4. Make the scratching post appealing to cats. Put catnip on it and be sure to praise your cat when you see her using the scratching post.
5. Replace old, worn-out scratching posts. If most of the carpet is worn away, or the post has become extremely ragged, it just isn't as much fun to use anymore.
6. Keep your cat's claws trimmed. You can do this at home with a safe tool made just for cat's claws (available at your local pet supply store.) This will make your cat more comfortable, and limit scratching damage to furniture. Shorter, less sharp claws will also keep you scratch-free when you and your cat cuddle. If you don't feel comfortable trimming your cat's claws, ask your vet or groomer to show you how.
7. If your cat is already in the habit of scratching your furniture, you will have to break her of that habit. Provide attractive scratching posts while you make your furniture less appealing. Cover the furniture: In some cases placing a slipcover over a couch can discourage a cat from scratching. If your cat is really determined to scratch the sofa, though, you will need to take more drastic steps:
 - Use repellents: There are some commercially available cat-repellents, intended to deter cats from scratching furniture. Choose one that is safe for indoor use, non-toxic, and recommended for furniture. The repellents have a faint odor, undetectable to humans, that cats find unpleasant, so they stay away from objects that have been sprayed. Repellents work for most cats but not all.
 - Try herbs: Some people use herbal products as safe non-chemical cat-repellents. Good choices are citrus oils or the herb rue, both of which cats dislike.

- Change the texture of the furniture: You can place specially designed adhesive-backed strips over the areas your cat likes to scratch. These strips, made just to discourage scratching, are available in pet supply stores. They stick right on your furniture and have a slippery surface to prevent cats from sinking their claws into the upholstery.
- Don't tempt your cat: If you are buying new furniture, stay away from textures that cats love to scratch. A really fuzzy plush couch may be too tempting for your cat to resist. It's a little like placing a plate of brownies in front of a group of kids and expecting them not to eat them.
- If all else fails you can ask your vet to put "Soft Paws" on your cat. These are soft plastic covers that go over the sharp part of the cat's claw. They prevent your cat from damaging furniture when she decides to scratch. These are non-toxic and painless. They do, however, need to be replaced from time to time.