



## Southside Animal Hospital

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### Should I Declaw My Cat?

Declawing cats is an idea that causes strong reactions in many people. Some argue it is cruel to cats. Other people argue the number one reason cats are turned into animal shelters is behavioral problems, with destructive clawing being one of the most common behavioral problems. As a Practitioner, I believe the most important thing is that an informed decision is made by the pet owner. We will discuss what declawing is and what you need to consider while making this decision in this article.

Declawing is more than just removing the nail from the foot. We remove the last bone of each toe to declaw a cat. All that bone must be removed. If a certain part of the bone is left, then the nail can regrow, causing the procedure to need to be done again. Since we are removing bone, this is a painful procedure. Most cats will walk carefully for one to two weeks. For one week following the surgery, you must use paper litter. Clay litter can get stuck in the incisions of the toes causing infection. The major risks of the surgery are bleeding, infection, excessive pain, and if any of the nail is left, nail regrowth.

Many people think that if they are going to have an indoor cat, I must have him declawed. This is not a good attitude. There are many things you should consider before you have this procedure done to your cat. The first question is why do you want this done? Is your cat being destructive? Is your cat being aggressive? Do you plan on getting or have leather furniture? If your cat is not being destructive, this is not a good reason to declaw your cat. If your cat is aggressively scratching or biting you, **NEVER** declaw your cat. This is the worst thing you could do. Most aggressive declawed cats become very bad biters. Cat bites are much worse than cat scratches. Aggressive cats generally do better as outdoor cats. Many people come to me wanting their cat declawed because they have or plan to get leather furniture. Leather furniture and indoor cats do not mix! Only choose one, an indoor cat or leather furniture.



A second question is do you want your cat to go outdoors at all? Declawed cats need to be indoors only. Several problems arise with a declawed outdoor cat. One is that they are missing critical defenses if they were to get in a fight. Another problem is cats do not climb trees as well without their front claws. As long as their back claws are there, they can do some climbing, but not as effectively or quickly. This is an important thing for outdoor cats. Climbing trees is used as a defense to get away from predators, most commonly dogs. Declawed cats are at a huge disadvantage outdoors.

A third consideration is what will you do if your cat develops other problems? Declawing affects the cat for the rest of his life. You do not know what will occur in the life of your cat. They could develop any number of problems. The most common behavioral problem with cats is inappropriate urination or defecation. If this begins, are you going to be willing to work with your cat to eliminate these problems? If not, and your reaction would be to put the cat outside, you should not have your cat declawed. If



your choice would be to find another home for the cat, then you would need to be aware that it is harder to find a home for a declawed cat.

A fourth consideration is how old is your cat? I do not recommend declawing cats over two years of age without careful consultation. The procedure is very painful for adult cats. Also these cats are very used to having their claws. I have heard of experiences where older cats have become depressed after declawing and refused to eat.

The fifth consideration, is if your cat is being destructive, have you tried any alternatives to declawing. One alternative is trimming your cat's nails. this is a simple procedure that anyone can do. By removing the hook of the claw, often the cat cannot destroy furniture. For a few cats, this is not easy and practical to do, but most cats are easy to do. Some cats can be trained to scratch on scratching post as opposed to furniture. Always get a tall scratching post so that cats can stretch out. You may want to use catnip as an attractant for the scratching post. Soft Paws are another alternative. It is a plastic cap that is glued on to the end of a trimmed nail. Some cats tolerate these well and some do not. They will need to be replaced every two or three months on a cat that tolerates them. Cats who do not do well with them have them off in a matter of weeks or days by chewing or licking at the soft paws.



If you think about these questions and still decide to declaw your cat, you have made an informed decision. It is important that think about what you are doing to your cat and the long-term ramifications of your decision. It is a decision that will affect the rest of your cat's life.