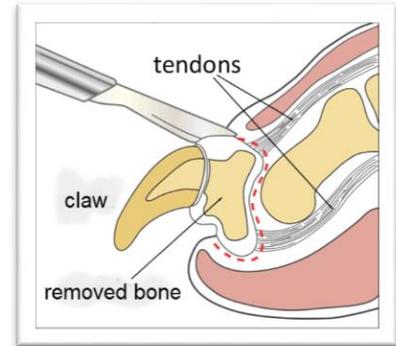


## Alternatives to declawing

### What is declawing?

A declawing or onychectomy is an elective surgery (not obligatory for the health of the animal) that is performed on cats and involves amputating the distal phalanges of the animal's toes, those that hold the nails. Declawing is now illegal in thirty countries. Since the Quebec Order of Veterinary Doctors has stated in various documents that the procedure is not recommended, many veterinary practices in Quebec have decided to stop performing the surgery.



Declawing is a painful procedure and a radical solution to eliminate a behaviour that is normal for cats, scratching. They do it for the following reasons :

- Scratching releases the nails from their sheaths and this allows them to grow.
- Scratching is a means of communication. The cat visually marks its territory and leaves an odour that is secreted from the glands between the toes.
- Cats love stretching and this involves clawing.

Certain owners believe that a declawed cat will no longer want to scratch, chase birds or climb trees. Declawing will not totally stop these behaviors but can reduce them. In fact, most cats will continue hunting even if they are declawed.

### What are the risks associated with declawing?

The medical risks include hemorrhaging, infection, chronic limping, exposure of the remaining bone of the toe and complications associated with general anesthesia. Declawing is the equivalent to amputating a human's fingertip (1st phalang).

A cat can sometimes experience phantom pain following the operation. Its brain detects pain in the nails even though they have been removed.

After the intervention some cats stop using their litter boxes even if the owner uses a soft litter. Certain cats refuse to let anyone touch their paws and some have a tendency to bite more. Other cats are unable to walk properly and this can reduce their normal activity.



Declawing also represents a danger for cats that go outside because they no longer have nails to defend themselves. They are also unable to climb in order to escape from dangerous situations.

## What are some alternatives to declawing?

### 1. Scratching pad or post

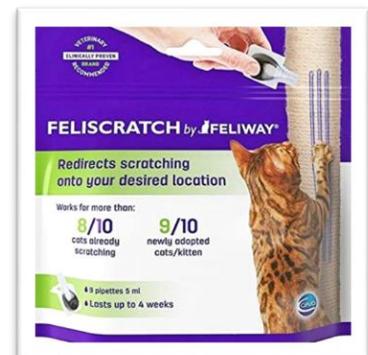
First, you must take into consideration your cat's regular behavior in its environment. Every cat should have his own scratching post. Check to see if your cat prefers to scratch a rug or a vertical surface such as the armrest of a sofa. You can then make or buy a solid scratching pad or post that is covered with carpet or hemp. It should be stable and long enough that the cat is able to stretch out its entire body when scratching it. The scratching apparatus can be sprinkled or sprayed with catnip and should be placed at your cat's favorite location in the house.



When your cat uses the scratching pad or post, reward it with a treat or by petting it. Discourage inappropriate clawing with a firm « No » and redirect your cat's attention to his scratching post. When you leave your home, close off all of the areas that contain articles that you do not want your cat to claw. You can use two-sided tape to protect the corners or the legs of your furniture. Kittens start to scratch when they are less than one month old. It is recommended to supply them with a scratching pad as soon as they are born.

### 2. Feliscratch by Feliway®

*Feliscratch by Feliway®* combines pheromones and catnip that help redirect cat scratching onto the scratching post. It helps to reduce or stop unwanted scratching. It is important to give your cat time to learn. Underlying causes may also need to be addressed by adding other products like *Feliway® Classic* or *Feliway® Friends* (if you own more than one cat).



### 3. Nail clipping

You can ask your veterinarian or animal health technician to show you how to cut your cat's nails.

- Press lightly on the pads of the paws to make the nails come out.
- Cut the translucent part of the nail which does not contain veins, not the pink part which is called the pulp. The pulp grows slightly along with the translucent part and will cause severe pain to your cat if it is cut.



Nail trimming is a necessary precaution that is not painful for your pet. By cutting your cat's nails twice monthly, there is less chance of the cat hurting someone or damaging your furniture.

### 4. Nail caps

Another alternative that is strongly recommended by veterinarians are nail caps (ex: *Soft Paws*®). These are soft plastic nails that are glued onto the cat's nails. This procedure can be done in a veterinary clinic by a technician or by you at home. The nail caps do not interfere with the cat's ability to extract and retract its nails nor with the natural growth of its nails. They will eventually fall off as the cat's nails grow and will need to be replaced every six to twelve weeks. The nail caps are totally harmless and non-toxic. The glue that is used to apply them is the same type of glue that veterinarians use during surgical procedures.



***Do not hesitate to ask our staff members about these alternatives.***

