

## Declawing of Domestic Cats

The AVMA strongly encourages client education prior to consideration of onychectomy (declawing). It is the obligation of the veterinarian to provide cat owners with a complete education with regard to the normal scratching behavior of cats, the procedure itself, as well as potential risks to the patient.

Onychectomy is an amputation and should be regarded as a major surgery. The decision to declaw a cat should be made by the owners in consultation with their veterinarian. Declawing of domestic cats should be considered only after attempts have been made to prevent the cat from using its claws destructively or when its clawing presents an above normal health risk for its owner(s).

The following points are the foundation for full understanding and disclosure regarding declawing:

- Surgical declawing is not a medically necessary procedure for the cat in most cases. While rare in occurrence, there are inherent risks and complications with any surgical procedure including, but not limited to, anesthetic complications, hemorrhage, infection and pain. If surgical onychectomy is performed, appropriate use of safe and effective anesthetics and perioperative analgesics for an appropriate length of time are imperative. Pain management is necessary (not elective) and required for this procedure. Multimodal pain management is recommended, and there should be a written aftercare plan. The surgical alternative of tendonectomy is not recommended.
- Scratching is a normal feline behavior, is a means for cats to mark their territory both visually and with scent, and is used for claw conditioning ("husk" removal) and stretching activity.
- Owners should provide suitable implements for normal scratching behavior. Examples are scratching posts, cardboard boxes, lumber or logs, and carpet or fabric remnants affixed to stationary objects. Implements should be tall or long enough to allow full stretching, and be firmly anchored to provide necessary resistance to scratching. Cats should be positively reinforced in the use of these implements.
- Appropriate claw care (consisting of trimming the claws every 1 to 2 weeks) should be provided to prevent injury or damage to household items.
- Temporary synthetic nail caps are available as an alternative to onychectomy to prevent human injury or damage to property. Plastic nail caps are usually applied every 4 to 6 weeks.
- Declawed cats should be housed indoors and allowed outside only under direct supervision.
- Scientific data do indicate that cats that have destructive scratching behavior are more likely to be euthanatized, or more readily relinquished, released, or abandoned, thereby contributing to the homeless cat population. Where scratching behavior is an issue as to whether or not a particular cat can remain as an acceptable household pet in a particular home, surgical onychectomy may be considered.

- There is no scientific evidence that declawing leads to behavioral abnormalities when the behavior of declawed cats is compared with that of cats in control groups.