

# Declawing Cats: More Than Just a Manicure

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Although new techniques for declawing cats, such as laser surgery and tenectomy, may lessen the pain that typically follows declawing, the surgery is still considered an unnecessary procedure for the majority of cats.

During laser surgery, a small, intense beam of light is used to cut through tissue by heating and vaporizing it, meaning there's less bleeding, less pain, and a shorter recovery time. But the surgical technique itself is similar to the traditional method (or "onychectomy"), with the laser simply replacing a steel scalpel blade. So the use of a laser is no substitute for a well-trained veterinarian with plenty of surgical experience. Moreover, the price of laser machinery ranges from \$25,000 to \$30,000, a prohibitive cost for most veterinary hospitals.

Another technique, known as a "tenectomy" (or tendonectomy), is becoming increasingly common. Rather than amputate the cat's claw, the surgeon removes a piece of the tendon that controls the cat's ability to flex and extend his claws. After surgery, the cat's claws are intact, but remain permanently extended. More than half of the cats who undergo this procedure can still use their claws to some extent, but cannot scratch normally. Because the cat can't sharpen his claws, the claws quickly become rough, grow excessively, and must then be trimmed on a regular basis.

A study published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* ("Comparison of effects of elective tenectomy or onychectomy in cats," Vol. 213, No. 3, August 1, 1998) found that, 24 hours after the procedure, cats who had undergone a tenectomy felt significantly less pain than did those who underwent an onychectomy. However, no long-term study of the tenectomy procedure has yet been published, and many veterinarians are concerned that cats subject to the operation may be prone to scarring, gnarling, and atrophy of the toes.

So while there have been advances in the way that cats are declawed, it's still true that for the majority of cats, the pain of this surgical procedure is unnecessary. Educated cat owners can easily train their cats to use their claws in a manner that allows cat and owner to happily coexist. Declawing and tenectomies should be reserved only for those rare cases in which a cat cannot be properly trained, and, as a result, must be surgically altered or removed from the home. In these cases, a veterinarian should inform the cat's caretakers about complications associated with the surgical procedures (including the possibility of infection, pain, and lameness) so that cat owners have realistic expectations about the outcome.

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Purchasing or building a scratching post is an important step in training a cat to avoid destructive scratching. Several companies manufacture scratching posts and other products that appeal to cats. Some companies and organizations have

developed similar plans for do-it-yourselfers. Here's a sampling of the products out there:

**Felix Katnip Tree Company**  
206-547-0042  
[www.felixkatnipreecompany.com](http://www.felixkatnipreecompany.com)

**Homemade Cat Ladder**  
[www.caws.org](http://www.caws.org)

**How to Build a Scratching Post**  
[www.catsinternational.org](http://www.catsinternational.org)

#### **Other Resources**

**Sticky Paws**  
1-888-697-2873  
[www.stickypaws.com](http://www.stickypaws.com)

**Soft Paws**  
1-800-989-2542  
[www.softpaws.com](http://www.softpaws.com)