

If you do accidentally cut the quick, stop the bleeding with a styptic pencil or powder. Cutting the quick is painful, and will teach the cat to fear nail trims. Always reward your cat when he's being cooperative during the nail trim.

Nail Caps

Rubber nail caps are available at pet supply stores and from your veterinarian. They prevent the cat from damaging surfaces while scratching. They need to be replaced every 3 - 5 weeks.

What about Declawing?

If the above methods do not work to prevent scratching damage, declawing may be an option.

The declawing surgery (called an "onychectomy") involves removing the entire nail and its third phalanx (analogous to having a finger cut off at the first knuckle). The surgery is performed under general anesthesia. It is a painful procedure that requires a few days or weeks for recuperation. An even greater amount of time may be needed for the physical and mental readjustment to life without claws.

Younger cats are more likely to quickly recover and adjust. Some cats may experience a personality change. They may become less active and withdrawn.

If you must declaw your cat, it is recommended that you only remove your cat's front claws. Ask your veterinarian for references, or get references from friends who have had their cats declawed. This will ensure the vet is skilled at the procedure and decrease the amount of trauma associated with the surgery.

If you are experiencing problems with destructive scratching, try to change your cat's behavior first. If this is not possible or feasible, discuss declawing further with your veterinarian.

For more information about animal-related issues, contact the Education Department at:
(630) 407-2819



DuPage County Animal Control
120 N. County Farm Road
Wheaton, IL 60187
Phone (630) 407-2800
Fax (630) 407-2801

Scratching & Declawing



What do Cats Use Their Nails For?

Why Do Cats Scratch?

Where Do Cats Scratch?

How Can I Stop Them From Scratching?

Nail Trimming

Nail Caps

What About Declawing?

Preventing a cat from scratching your couch, carpet or other surfaces can sometimes be easy. If the owner is unsuccessful at changing the cat's behavior, declawing is an option.

What do Cats Use their Nails for?

Cats use their nails mainly for balance and defense. When a cat jumps, climbs, changes directions or makes quick maneuvers, the nails are used to maintain balance and traction. They are also the cat's primary means of defense and escape.

Why do Cats Scratch?

A cat scratches for many reasons. One is because the nail structure and growth pattern is unique. The outer layer of the cat's nail, called the sheath, does not grow with the rest of the nail. It needs to be shed as the nail grows. Scratching removes the itchy sheath and is a great way for the cat to get a good stretch. Cats also have scent glands in their foot pads. Scratching is a way of scent-marking. This behavior is "hard-wired" in cats, meaning cats will continue to scratch even when there is no appropriate place to do it, or after being declawed.

Where do Cats Scratch?

Cats tend to prefer certain surfaces for scratching, such as horizontal or vertical surfaces, plush or Berber carpet, rope, wood, soft fabric, speaker covers, etc.

How can I Stop the Cat from Clawing My Stuff?

Providing your cat with his preferred surface on a tall, sturdy scratching post will limit the amount of scratching he does on your furniture, carpet, etc. Make sure the post *cannot* tip over when the cat uses it. The post should be taller than your cat is when he is fully stretched out and scratching (at least 3' for adult cats). Then, make other surfaces he uses unappealing. Spray-on indoor cat repellents are available. Cover your couch, speakers, doors, etc. with plastic and double-sided sticky tape. You can also "booby-trap" these areas. "Booby-traps" are punishments that come from the environment. They are effective because the cat learns to avoid the source of the punishment. If the punishment source is an inappropriate scratching spot, the cat will learn to avoid scratching there.

An example of a booby trap is to string soda cans together and set them up on top of the scratching spot. Hang the end of the strings down where your cat scratches. When he goes to scratch, the

soda cans will come tumbling down. Be sure to make the string length between the cans short so your cat doesn't get tangled up in the cans.

Motion detectors that set off alarms or flashing lights are very effective environmental punishments and are available at pet supply and home security stores.

Nail Trimming

Keeping your cat's nails trimmed will greatly reduce the chance of damage if your cat *does* continue to scratch elsewhere. Nail trimming should be done every 7-10 days. Frequent nail trims will cause the nail quick (blood supply) to grow back, making the nails grow much slower and become much shorter & rounded on the ends.

To trim your cat's nails, hold the cat in a comfortable position, similar to propping up an infant against you on your lap. Gently squeeze the cat's paw to expose the retracted claws. Using people nail clippers or cat clippers, cut the sharp tip of the nail off. Be careful not to cut the quick, which is the visible pink part inside the nail.