



Dane County Humane Society Board of Directors Position Statement Declawing of Cats

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Elective Declawing of Cats

Dane County Humane Society (DCHS) considers elective onychectomy of cats (commonly known as “declaw”) to be unnecessary and not in the best interest of the species. Declawing is the surgical amputation of the last bone in each toe of a cat in order to remove the claw and prevent natural scratching behavior.

Declawing increases the risk of a cat suffering long-term or persistent pain, unwanted behaviors such as urinating and defecating outside of the litterbox, and aggression.^{1,2} Declawing has also been associated with many surgical complications, including hemorrhage, claw regrowth, nerve damage, infections, and skin necrosis. These are often linked to either poor surgical technique or the method of onychectomy performed.^{3,4}

Scientific data shows declawing cats does not prevent significant difference in relinquishment of cats to shelters. For example, a recent article studying the effects of legislation banning elective declaw in British Columbia showed no increase in cats surrendered after the ban was passed.⁵

Declawing is a surgical procedure designed to change a natural behavior. Behavior issues should instead be addressed with behavioral and environmental modification. Numerous options exist, including regularly trimming nails, training cats to scratching posts and other acceptable surfaces, and using gel nail caps to cover the claw. The American Veterinary Medical Association’s⁶ and the American Animal Hospital Association’s⁷ position statements recommend considering all alternatives to declaw prior to considering this procedure. The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) also strongly opposes declawing as an elective procedure, concluding: “It is the obligation of veterinarians to provide cat owners with alternatives to declawing.”⁸

References:

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4. Clark K, Bailey T, Rist P, Matthews A. Comparison of 3 methods of onychectomy. *Can Vet J* 2014;55:255-262.
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7. American Animal Hospital Association (2021, June). Declawing. <https://www.aaha.org/about-aaha/aaha-position-statements/declawing>
8. American Association of Feline Practitioners (2017). 2017 Declawing Position Statement. <https://catvets.com/guidelines/position-statements/declawing>