



Noah's Ark Animal Hospital

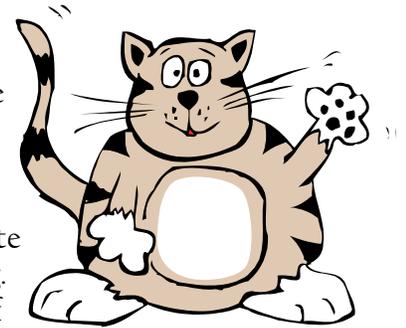
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Onchyectomy ("Declaw")

Declawing is the surgical amputation/removal under general anesthesia of the last part of the cat's toe. This is a procedure that is the center of much controversy between pet owners and veterinarians alike. You owe it to your cat to at least be educated on the topic and the alternatives that exist. One thing that must be recognized is that scratching is a natural part of feline behavior which serves to sharpen the claws, serves as a visual and scent mark, and is a means of stretching. When scratching is directed at furniture or other members of the family, it is unacceptable and poses a problem.

Should I have my pet declawed?

In most cases, scratching can often be managed by environmental and behavioral management. Inappropriate scratching can be prevented by keeping the cat away from problem areas and trimming the nails regularly, while acceptable scratching can be allowed and encouraged by providing a proper scratching post. Should the cat continue to scratch in an inappropriate area, the post could be moved to that area, and/or the scratched furniture can be covered with a less appealing material (e.g. plastic, a loosely draped piece of material). Remote punishment (e.g. spray with a water bottle) and environmental punishment (e.g. sticky tape, motion detectors, Scat mats®) can be used to deter further scratching of an area. Plastic nail coverings called Soft Paws® can be glued over the claws monthly.



For those owners with destructive cats who cannot train them to use a scratching post, or are unable to commit to regular nail trimming, other options must be considered. Sometimes the welfare of a family member needs to be protected (e.g. humans with compromised immune systems due to HIV, immunosuppressive therapy, or patients on blood thinners and for which bleeding poses concern) from the claws of a pet cat. In these situations, declawing provides the family the ability to keep the cat and enjoy the rewards of pet ownership. Declawing can mean that fewer cats need to be rehomed or euthanized and that more cats can be placed.

After consideration of your circumstances, you may determine that declawing your cat is necessary. Although there will be temporary pain associated with the procedure, it may be worth it in the long run to keep your cat a happy member of your household.

At what age should this be done?

In general, the younger a cat the better it will do recovering from the declaw procedure. As a cat ages, the blood vessels supplying the claws enlarge and there is greater possibility of complications related to excessive bleeding and infection. In addition as cats age they tend to gain weight which means more force on their feet, leading to greater pain during the recovery period. The best time to declaw is at the time of spay or neuter, usually between 4 to 6 months of age. Most cats declawed at this time recover very quickly with minimal problems.

What exactly is done and is it painful?

At Noah's Ark Animal Hospital we have invested in the technology of a carbon dioxide (CO₂) surgical laser. As with other procedures, the laser's ability to cauterize and seal blood vessels and nerves greatly reduces postoperative pain. In the case of declawing, this is very evident in that most cats place weight on their feet, usually immediately following surgery (in traditional procedures this often takes several days). Another benefit of the laser is that in most cats no bleeding occurs (traditional methods require a tourniquet and are very bloody). Using the laser, an incision is made through the skin around the base of the claw. This loose skin is pushed back to expose the ligaments holding the claw on. The upper ligament (extensor ligament) is cut, followed by the ligaments on each side of the claw (collateral ligaments) and finally the lower ligament (flexor tendon) is cut. This procedure is repeated for each claw (a total of 10). Unlike traditional declaw methods, when we use the laser, we do not need to stitch or glue the tissue openings together and in most cases we do not need to place bandages on the feet. As with any surgery, there is some pain involved; however, we give pain medication before surgery to help keep your cat comfortable. Complications are rare, but include excessive postoperative bleeding or infection, and prolonged or in extremely rare cases, varying degrees of permanent lameness. Because of the potential for bleeding during the period immediately after surgery, your cat will need to spend a minimum of one night in the hospital following surgery.

What do I need to do to prepare my pet?

It is important that anesthesia be administered on an empty stomach to reduce the risk of vomiting while under anesthesia and during the recovery period. For this reason, we ask that you take up your pet's food at 8:00 p.m. the night before surgery. Please allow your pet to have water at all times to avoid dehydration.

Be sure you have reviewed the handout on anesthesia before arriving the morning of surgery. Please arrive promptly at your scheduled admission time and be sure to allow 10-15 minutes of time for paperwork and decision making. If you have reviewed the anesthesia handout you will be able to make informed decisions at this time. Please inform or remind the admitting nurse about any procedures that you wish to be completed while your pet is here (e.g. dental work, microchipping, lump removal, etc.).



Most procedures are done mid-day and early afternoon, allowing the morning to run any blood work, and/or administer presurgical calming medications. For elective surgeries, please call after 3:00 p.m. for updates.

We will call you the night before your scheduled surgery/dental appointment, to confirm the date and to answer any questions you might have. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to call us with any questions about your pet's surgery!

_____ 's surgery is scheduled for _____, admission at _____ a.m.