

Living with a Declawed Cat



A practical guide to making life easier on both of you

Declawed cats can live good lives, but to make sure that they feel safe and comfortable in their homes, here are a few ideas to specifically cater to their lack of claws, a real disability for a cat. Declawed cats have had all or most of their last toe bones in their paws amputated. This changes the way they can move and climb. They can no longer use their claws to protect themselves. They can experience chronic pain, not only in their paws but in their joints and back muscles. That's because they walk on their toes—technically known as “digitigrade”—so the loss of those toe joints throws off their posture in a painful way.

Vertical and Horizontal Spaces

Cats may feel more secure when they can get up high to survey their territory. Putting two cat trees next to each other, so the cat can move upward, step by step, without having to climb vertically, can help. This also protects the cat from having to jump down, which can hurt the amputated area. You can purchase yoga mats in rolls and use them to cushion cat steps on hard floors.

Ramps

Many commercially available ramps can help animals get on furniture and help prevent your cat not only from falling when trying to get up but also from hurting the paws when jumping down. Choose a ramp that isn't steep and is covered in a non-slip material.

Litter Boxes

Some declawed cats may stop using their litter box. This may be a result of pain from digging in rough litter or because they have overall chronic pain. Others might stop because they no longer have their claws to put visual markers on their environment and choose to urine-mark instead.

Place litter boxes in easily accessible spaces, where cats have privacy but don't have to walk far. There are a variety of softer litter choices that might be easier on declawed paws.

Never punish a cat for not using the litter box. A veterinary health check can ensure that there is no medical reason (such as acute or chronic pain, or a bladder infection) causing litter box avoidance. A board-certified veterinary behaviorist can address medical and behavioral causes of inappropriate elimination.



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Declawed cats don't need other cats to be declawed

Declawed cats can live happily with clawed cats as long as they both have their needs met. Environmental enrichment is key to prevent social conflict in multi-cat households. Make sure each cat has their own perch, litter box, and favorite toys.

Signs of Pain in Cats

Signs of pain include not jumping up or down, choosing to walk only on carpets or floors of certain textures, holding one or more paws up, avoiding putting weight on toes, not wanting to be touched on the paws or below the neck, overgrooming, not using the litter box, biting, hiding, attacking, sleeping a lot, and changes in expression in the face, whiskers, and ears.

Pain Management

Many behavior changes noted in declawed cats may stem from chronic or intermittent pain. Cats are masters at hiding pain, so one way to see if they are in pain is to give them pain medication prescribed by their veterinarian and note if there is a change in behavior afterward. A veterinarian should be consulted if a cat exhibits any of the pain signs listed in the previous section. Only medications prescribed by the veterinarian should be administered to the cat since some drugs used in other species, like dogs and humans, can be dangerous for cats.

Jennifer Conrad, DVM, Founder and Director of the Paw Project