

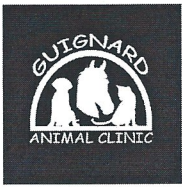


Guignard Animal Clinic

1216 S. Guignard Dr., Sumter, SC 29150
(803) 775-9152 ph. (803) 778-8146 fx.

What are the potential complications of declawing?

- Post-surgical complications. Lameness, abscesses, and claw regrowth can occur days or weeks or many years after surgery. In one study that followed cats for only 5 months after surgery, about 25% of cats developed complications from both declaw and tenectomy surgeries (digital tenectomy or tendonectomy is a procedure, sometimes promoted as an "alternative" to declaw, where the tendons that extend the toes are cut).
- Pain. It is impossible to know how much chronic pain and suffering declawing causes. However, we can look at similar procedures in people. Almost all human amputees report "phantom" sensations from the amputated part, ranging from merely strange to extremely painful. Because declawing involves ten separate amputations, it is virtually certain that all declawed cats experience phantom pain in one or more toes. In humans, these sensations continue for life, and there is no physiological reason that this would not be true for cats. Cats typically conceal pain or illness until it becomes overwhelming. With chronic pain, it may be that they simply learn to live with it. Their behavior may appear normal, but a lack of overt signs of pain does not mean they are pain-free.
- Joint Stiffness. In declawed (and tenectomized) cats, the tendons that control the toe joints retract after the surgery, and over time these joints become essentially "frozen." The toes can no longer be extended, but remain fully contracted for the lifetime of the cat. In cats that have been declawed for many years, these joints cannot be moved, even under deep anesthesia. The fact that most cats continue to "scratch" after they are declawed is often said to "prove" that the cat does not "miss" her claws. However, this could also be explained by the cat's desperate desire to stretch those stiff, contracted joints.
- Arthritis. Researchers have shown that, in the immediate post-operative period, newly declawed cats shift their body weight backward onto the large central pad of the front feet and off the toes. This effect was significant even when strong pain medication was given, and remained apparent for the duration of the study (up to 40 hours after surgery). If this altered gait persists over time, it would cause stress on the leg joints and spine, and could lead to damage and arthritic changes in multiple joints.
- Litterbox Problems. Experts say that declawed cats have more litterbox problems than clawed cats. Not many people would choose urine-soaked carpeting (or floorboards, sofa cushions, drywall, bedding or mattresses) over scratch marks, but this is a distressingly common outcome. In one survey, 95% of calls about declawed cats related to litterbox problems, while only 46% of clawed cats had such problems -- and most of those were older cats, many with physical ailments that accounted for the behavior. Some households with declawed cats have spent thousands of dollars to repair urine damage.
- Biting. Some experts believe that naturally aggressive cats who are declawed are likely to become biters.
- Death. There is always a small but real risk of death from any general anesthesia, as well as from hemorrhage or other surgical complications. Declawing that results in biting or inappropriate elimination may result in the cat being up locked in a basement, dumped at a shelter, or simply abandoned. If taken to shelters, such behaviors make them unadoptable, and they will be destroyed. Many cats are exiled to a life outdoors because of these unwanted behaviors, even though declawed cats should not be allowed outside -- their ability to defend themselves, and to escape danger by climbing, is seriously impaired. They also risk injury or death by dogs, cars, coyotes, poison, and other hazards of outdoor life. It is unfortunately common to have outdoor cats stolen and used as live bait to train fighting dogs, or sold to laboratories or biological suppliers.



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