

FAQs



This page includes responses to many questions that you or your clients may have, as well as sample phone counseling scripts and additional responses to clients.

Frequently Asked Questions - Clients

Why won't you declaw? I know you'll do a better job with my cat than if I go somewhere else! Please!

Yes, we are fortunate to have excellent veterinarians who are skilled in surgery and pain management. However, even with the best surgeon, (Meowington) can still experience long-term pain and increased behavior problems resulting from declawing. These are the reasons we no longer perform declaws – we are concerned for (Meowington's) well-being.

Why won't you declaw? I'm going to take my cat to another practice then!

I understand it can be frustrating to hear we won't perform a declaw for you. You have been a client for a long time (or are a new client), and we would like to continue providing (Meowington) with the very best veterinary care. Can I describe to you what a declawing procedure entails and how it can affect and even harm your cat? New research shows that even when done right and with excellent pain management, declawing can cause lifelong pain and increase behavior problems. Additionally, scratching is a critical and normal behavior for cats. It allows them to stretch and release stress, but they can't scratch without claws. For more information, please refer to the Phone Scripts.

You used to offer it. Why was it okay then but not now? Should I be concerned that my cat you declawed three years ago may be in pain? How can I tell?

Yes, we used to perform declaws. The veterinary profession is continuing to advance and learn more about doing

a better job for our patients. There have been recent scientific studies on the effects of declawing, and they show that declaws can cause cats chronic pain, as well as increase behavior issues. Based on this new information, we have made the decision to stop performing declawing because we care about your cat's long-term health and welfare.

For cats that have been previously declawed, we will continue to monitor for any pain and discuss any behavior issues during your cat's routine check-ups. Additionally, we encourage you to monitor (Meowington) at home. If you notice any small behavior changes such as reduced jumping, urinating outside of the litter box, excessive grooming, aggression or biting, or hiding, please call us right away. If we identify (Meowington) might be in pain, we will recommend treatment to help (him/her) stay comfortable.

We should also discuss enhancing (Meowington's) environmental enrichment. Since scratching is a normal behavior for cats, we need to make sure to provide the opportunity for (Meowington) to express other normal feline behaviors. I have an excellent brochure to share with you called "Your Cat's Environmental Needs."

Please refer to the AAFP's Environmental Needs Client brochure and www.catfriendly.com/environmental-needs.

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Frequently Asked Questions - Clients *continued***Why are you trying to make me feel guilty and feel like a bad pet owner?**

I know that you love (Meowington) and I believe in your ability to make the right decision for your cat. This can be a difficult and sensitive topic, and as a veterinarian, I'm obligated to explain this procedure and what effects it could have on (Meowington). Because you are a vital part of your cat's health team, we want you to be as informed as possible on any and all procedures you are considering for your cat. I felt you deserved to know why our practice has decided to stop declawing cats.

Frequently Asked Questions - Veterinary Professionals**What if an owner decides to bring the cat down the street to another practice? I know at least that I can provide a more cat-friendly experience and ensure appropriate pain management.**

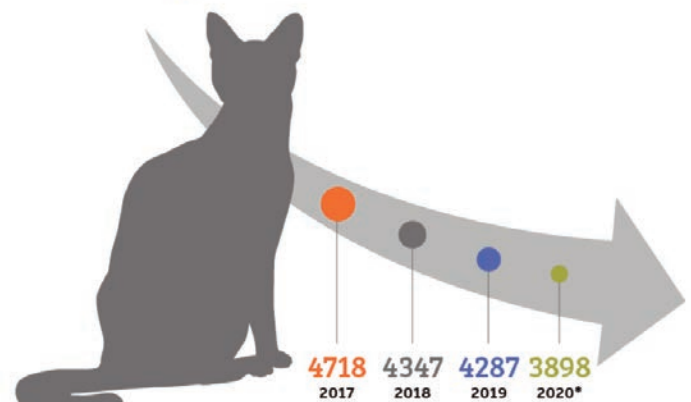
We never want a client going to another practice, and we certainly never want a client going to a practice we think will not provide a good experience or quality feline medicine. However, even when a veterinarian is an excellent surgeon and experienced at declawing, the potential for chronic problems still exist. This is a decision based upon what is best for cats mentally, physically, and emotionally. With new medical knowledge, we recognize that declawing impairs feline welfare by inhibiting their ability to perform normal scratching behavior.

Additionally, despite excellent analgesia, long-term pain resulting from declawing is common, as well as an increased incidence of behavioral problems. As veterinarians, it is our responsibility to protect the welfare of our patients and provide the highest standard care. We have basic ethical precepts that at the forefront include that we should avoid harming our patients.

Won't more cats get surrendered if I don't declaw?

This is a common misperception, and there is no evidence that more cats get surrendered if declawing is not an option. Most cat owners do not know what declawing entails and are embarrassed when they find out the specifics about the procedure. Also, many cat owners declaw because that's what they've always done. Education is the first step in explaining to cat owners why

cat's scratch and that it is normal feline behavior. As you can see in this data from the Dumb Friends League, one of the largest animal shelters in Denver, the number of surrendered cats has decreased since Denver banned declawing.

Annual Number of Owner Surrendered Cats has Decreased Since Implementation of Denver Declaw Ban**

*Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) may impact this number
**Source: Dumb Friends League in Denver, CO (FY2020 statistics, July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020)

How can I stop declawing? I'm going to lose clients because they want/need their cats to be declawed?

The first step in this process is education for clients as well as the veterinary team. You can find helpful information for your team on the Practice Plan tab and information to start and/or enhance client education on the Scratching Resources tab. If you have a large demand for declawing, then you might need to be proactive and provide interviews, write blogs, and put together general information so your clients and others in your local area understand what a declaw truly entails. Many other veterinary practices have already chosen to stop performing declawing procedures over the past several years and have not lost clients. They educated their clients on the negative aspects of declawing and counseled them on how to prevent their cats from scratching in undesirable areas. Many practices have actually gained more clients because they stopped declawing. Clients often recognize that you are acting in the best interest of cats. Clients recognize and respect you as a veterinary professional. When you make the decision to stop, they will see that you have given this meaningful thought and respect your decision.

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Why should I stop declawing as I use laser technique that is less painful, right?

The use of a laser to perform a declaw does not change the surgical approach, which involves amputation of the third phalanx of each digit. In that process, tissue is cut and the procedure is painful. While past studies have suggested that the immediate postoperative recovery period is less painful when laser declaw is performed compared to scalpel declaw, the data clearly show ongoing pain for both surgery methods. At no time does either surgery result in a painless postoperative experience. In addition, these patients were only studied for 12 or fewer days post-operatively. Some of the additional complications that can occur including chronic pain, retrained P3 fragments, and tendon contraction, occur in declawed cats regardless of surgical method, including laser. Long-term behavior changes are documented including house soiling, aggression and biting, and barbering. Declawed cats also show an increased risk of back pain associated with being declawed, regardless of the surgical method used.

Phone Counseling for Inquiries About Declawing Initial Inquiry

The practice should decide who will provide educational information to any clients requesting declawing. It is important to discuss responses with your entire team for consistency. Below are some examples of how to handle inquiries.

“Thank you for calling (practice name). This is (your name), how can I help you?”

Client – “How much does it cost to have my cat declawed?”

Practice – “May I first have your name and the name of your cat?”

Client – “Her name is (Meowington), and mine is (Janice).”

Practice – “Have we seen (Meowington) before, (Janice)?”

Client – “Yes/No”

Practice – “We actually don’t perform declawing procedures here at (practice name), but we would really like to help you. I’m sure we can help find a solution that works for both you and (Meowington).”

Do you have time today or tomorrow to speak with (Team member name) so they can discuss this with you and/or examine your cat?”

+ Follow-up Phone Call

Practice – “Hello, I’m (your name) calling from (practice name). May I please speak with (Janice)? Do you have a few minutes to discuss declawing, scratching behavior, and alternatives with me?”

Client – “Yes/No”

Practice – “Scratching is a natural cat behavior, but did you know that it is also a behavior that is very important for (Meowington)? Cat’s need to scratch to maintain the necessary claw motion used in hunting and climbing, remove the old nail, stretch their body, and as a means of visual and olfactory, or scent, communication. Cats also seem to really enjoy scratching.”

I know that you don’t want (Meowington)’s scratching to harm your home and belongings. I have some great resources that I would love to share with you that can help train (Meowington) to scratch on more appropriate surfaces and stop causing damage to your home. For more information, please refer to the Client Resources.

Practice – Has anyone ever shown you how to trim (Meowington’s) nails?”

Client – “No”

Practice – “We would be glad to show you how to trim (his/her) nails, or we can do it for you! Why don’t you bring (him/her) in?”

Client – “Why don’t you perform declawing procedures at (your practice)?”

Practice – “Since declawing is an elective procedure that is not medically necessary, we don’t perform declaw surgery unless it is medically necessary, such as tumors or infection. Declawing entails the amputation of a cat’s third phalanx [P3], or third ‘toe bone.’ Unlike human nails, cats’ claws are attached to the last bone in their toes. A comparison would be cutting off a person’s finger at the last joint of each finger. Would you be interested in learning more about all of the alternatives there are to declawing?”

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Client – “If you won’t perform the declawing surgery, then I’ll just take them to someplace that will.”

Practice – It sounds like you are frustrated, and I’m sorry that you are feeling that way. It can be very frustrating to have your cat scratching up your house. Declawing sounds like an easy solution, but it is a serious surgery that can have medical complications and/or cause life-long pain. We want to work WITH you to find a successful strategy for both you and (Meowington). We take our medical oath very seriously and must act in your cat’s best interest as well. Would you like to come in for a complimentary scratching consultation to see if there’s another way?

Additional Responses to Client Inquiries

My apartment/landlord says I cannot have a cat unless they are declawed.

This is quite disappointing to hear. Have you checked with City Hall/the municipality? Landlords certainly have the right to protect their property, but they cannot insist on what you do or don’t do to your cat. We’d be happy to provide information that you can share with your landlord, as well as counsel you on redirecting scratching (if appropriate), so you can demonstrate your efforts to both allow your cat to exhibit their natural behaviors and that you value your landlord’s property. For more information, please refer to Client Resources - Living with a Clawed Cat.

My cats stay inside, so they are safe from outdoor threats!

You are right that indoor cats cannot be hit by cars or get into fights with other animals unless they get out, but we still have to meet their behavioral needs so they can do the things that make a cat a cat. And sometimes, when cats aren’t able to exhibit their natural behaviors, they feel stressed and may direct that stress towards other actions such as scratching, marking, or house-soiling.

I have a baby/grandmother/live with an immunocompromised person, and I don’t want them to get scratched!

That’s understandable! Sometimes people believe that cats spread dangerous things through scratches. It is true that Cat Scratch Disease is spread via scratches, but the organism that causes this disease is found in flea dirt, so treating for and preventing fleas, will eliminate that risk. Trimming nails every 4-6 weeks really helps as well. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) does not recommend declawing to prevent transmission of Cat Scratch Fever. The CDC also does not recommend declawing to protect immunocompromised people. Instead, the CDC and veterinarians recommend regular nail trims, regular flea prevention, and avoiding rough play with cats. We recommend using an interactive toy and never playing with your hands or by wiggling hands or feet. Protecting children and family members from cat scratches is accomplished through gentle and proper handling of the cat, avoiding rough play, and trimming their nails regularly. Children should be taught to treat their cat with respect and to play with the cat using an interactive toy. Young children should have adult supervision when interacting with them. For more information, please refer to Client Resources - Playing with Your Cat and Cats & Kids.



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Additional Responses to Client Inquiries *continued***How do I explain that I don't declaw to clients that say they are immunocompromised?**

It is understandable that clients may relay that they do not want to be scratched if they or someone in their household is immunocompromised. People often worry that cats spread dangerous diseases through scratches. It is true that Cat Scratch Disease is spread via scratches, but the bacterial organism (*Bartonella henselae*) that causes this disease is found in flea dirt, which can get under the cat's claws if there is a flea infestation. Treating cats with routine flea and parasite prevention regardless of indoor/outdoor status will prevent fleas, thereby eliminating that risk. In addition, the benefits of using routine broad spectrum parasite prevention also means that the immunocompromised individual will not be at risk for exposure to other parasites such as helminths. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) does not recommend declawing to prevent transmission of Cat Scratch Fever. The CDC does not recommend declawing to protect immunocompromised people. Instead, the CDC and veterinarians recommend regular nail trims, regular flea prevention, and avoiding rough play with cats. With data indicating that declawed cats may be more likely to bite and/or house soil, the risks of infectious disease exposure are not at all negated by onychectomy.

We can relay this information to concerned clients and provide these helpful tips:

1. Trim the cat's nails every 4-6 weeks to reduce damage from potential scratches. Practices should consider demonstrating how to trim nails and discuss tactics with clients that may make this a more positive experience for their cat such as distraction techniques, as well as thinking about the appropriate time and location to approach their cat. You may even want to discuss with your team the possibility of offering routine or complimentary nail trims.
2. Avoid rough play with cats. Veterinary professionals can recommend using interactive toys and remind clients to never play with their hands or by wiggling hands or feet. Protecting children and family members from cat scratches is accomplished through gentle and proper handling of the cat and avoiding rough play. You can also share resources with families with children so they can be taught to treat their cat with respect and to play with the cat using an interactive toy. Young children should have adult supervision when interacting with them. (See Client Resources – Playing with Your Cat and Cats & Kids).

3. Ensure the cat receives regular parasite prevention treatments as directed by a veterinarian.
4. Individuals with compromised immune systems may consider adopting adult cats as they tend to be calmer and less rough than kittens who have not yet developed their social skills.

Additional information about zoonotic disease, prevention, and transmission can be found in the 2019 AAFP Zoonoses Guidelines, which also includes a Client Brochure and podcast.

