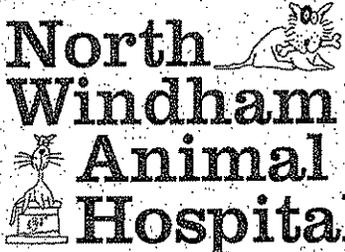


North  
Windham  
Animal  
Hospital



February 17, 2011

Representative Susan Johnson  
120 Bolivia Street  
Willimantic, CT 06226

Dear Representative Johnson,

I am writing to support House Bill 5563, "An Act Concerning Limiting the Ability of Landlords to require declawing of cats and allowing alternatives to this cruel practice." I have been a licensed, practicing small animal veterinarian in Connecticut for over 30 years and am owner of the North Windham Animal Hospital in North Windham, CT.

"Declawing" consists of amputating not only the 10 front claws of a cat, but the whole last joint of each digit (finger). The surgery includes cutting bone joint, tendons, nerve, joint capsule, blood vessels and ligaments. If performed on a human being, declawing would be like cutting off each finger at the last knuckle.

The surgery is not without serious and often multiple complications, including but not limited to infection, abnormal stance, osteitis (bone inflammation) and prolonged lameness. An alternative surgery involves cutting the tendons to the claws, rendering the cat unable to control the ends of its digits (fingers). This surgery can also cause serious complications. In my own experience, I have seen cats suffer with not only pain, but cellulitis, vasculitis, and even amputation of toes that would otherwise be painful for the life of the cat.

A recent study (Vet Surg 1994 Jul-Aug;23(4):274-280) in 163 cats that underwent routine declawing surgery showed that 50% developed one or more complications after surgery. Some of the complications were life long.

By employing multiple scratching posts made of material that cats enjoy scratching, performing frequent nail clipping, and simply performed behavior training, most owners can control their cat's scratching impulses to be non destructive to the environment or apartment. I highly recommend these alternatives to our clients when faced with a declawing decision. Torturing cats with painful digit (finger) amputation is cruel, and in most cases, not necessary.

Please feel free to contact me if you need further information or details.

Sincerely,



Todd B Friedland, DVM

# Declawing a cat is like amputating a finger

By ALISA MULLINS

Crazy cat ladies of America, you have some explaining to do. According to a recent Associated Press poll, 55 percent of cat guardians are in favor of declawing, while only 8 percent of dog fanciers agree with debarking, or surgically removing dogs' vocal chords. As usual, in a battle of cats vs. dogs, the cats get the short end of the stick — or, in this case, the short end of the toe.

I can only hope that most of the people who voted for declawing don't know exactly what it is. Declawing is like taking a hatchet to a hangnail — literally. It involves 10 separate, painful surgeries, severing not just the nails but the whole joint, including the bones, ligaments and tendons.

As veterinarian Louise Murray puts it, "If you look at your fingers, declawing would be like amputating the last section of each finger. If you were declawed, you would have 10 little short fingers. It's amputation times 10."

Complications of declawing include chronic pain, nerve damage, hemorrhaging, bone chips, recurrent infections and abnormal regrowth of the nail inside the paw. Because cats have to walk on their shortened "fingers," declawing can impair their movement and balance and cause chronic leg pain and backaches.

Oh, and let's not forget those other two common "complications" of declawing — biting and spraying. I've had two declawed cats in my life (both were already declawed when

## Commentary

they came to me), and one was a biter and the other is a sprayer. Think snagged furniture is the worst of your problems? Try walking into a house that reeks of cat urine. It takes destruction of property to a whole new level.

One theory is that when cats use the litterbox in the days after declawing surgery, they associate the pain they feel in their feet with the litterbox and develop an aversion to it. As for biting, it's thought that cats resort to using their teeth when they realize that their claws — their first line of defense — have been permanently hacked off.

Some cats are so shell-shocked by declawing that they become neurotically fearful of real and imagined predators. Stretch, my "biter," was just such a cat. He was initially so fearful of everyone and everything that he essentially lived on top of the refrigerator for the first three months that I had him.

Not all declawed cats become biters and sprayers, of course, but you have no way of knowing how your cat will react until it's too late. When I placed an ad in the paper searching for the owner of Stretch, whom I found as a stray, the only response I received was what I sincerely hope was a prank call telling me to do unspeakable things to him. Either way, I'm assuming that Stretch's biting may have led to his abandonment in a rural wooded

area, where he was truly defenseless without his claws and had every reason to be afraid, very afraid.

Declawing is a permanent solution to what is often a temporary problem. Kittens usually outgrow their urge to scale the drapes and attack your wiggling toes.

Most cats naturally gravitate toward scratching posts and cardboard scratching boxes, especially if you make them more alluring with catnip and toys. Claws' destructiveness can be curtailed with biweekly trimming. You trim your dog's nails — why not your cat's?

Declawing is so cruel that it's illegal in England and parts of Europe. The British Veterinary Association calls it an "unnecessary mutilation."

In the U.S., the Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights asks practitioners to refuse to perform the surgery. Dr. Louis J. Camuti, the first veterinarian in the U.S. to devote his practice exclusively to cats, once said, "I wouldn't declaw a cat if you paid me \$1,000 a nail!"

Until cats' guardians have a change of heart about this cruel procedure, let's hope that more veterinarians will follow Dr. Camuti's compassionate lead.

*Mullins is a senior writer for the PETA Foundation, 501 Front Street, Norfolk, Va. 23510; [www.PETA.org](http://www.PETA.org).*

*Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Information Services.*