

# Cats Need Claws!

**Humane Society of West Michigan celebrates claws! If you are thinking about having your cat declawed, consider that cats need their claws for the following reasons:**

- A cat's graceful sense of balance is due in part to their claws which help establish footing for walking, running, jumping, climbing, and stretching.
- Cats have a strong instinct to mark their territory. Scratching allows them to express the scent glands through their paw pads, rather than with urine. The scent they deposit by scratching cannot be detected by humans, but it comforts the cat and helps them communicate with other cats as well.
- Cats get itchy! Claws are useful for scratching itches.
- Claws are a cat's primary defense.
- Scratching helps cats shed the outer layers of their claws.
- Scratching relieves your cat's anxiety.

Along with leading animal welfare organizations, HSWM highly discourages declawing as it can negatively impact the long-term health or behavior of your cat. Declawing is a procedure which involves amputating of the last bone of each toe. If performed on a human, it would be like cutting off each finger at the last knuckle. Imagine trying to navigate your life after having ten fingertip amputations - it would change the way you live permanently, just as declawing will change a cat. Removing a cat's ability to scratch is also stressful, and they may respond to that stress with undesirable behavioral issues. Medical complications that may result from declawing include abscesses, painful bone spurs and regrowth of a deformed claw. Over time, some declawed cats develop arthritis or back pain due to their unnatural gait.

It's easy to train your cats to scratch appropriately as long as you provide them with alternatives to your furniture! Horizontal cardboard scratchers are inexpensive and can double as beds. Vertical scratching posts can help your cat stretch - just make sure they're tall (at least 2 ft.) and sturdy. When it comes to placement, don't tuck those scratching posts away in a back corner! Cats need multiple scratching surfaces in socially significant areas near your furniture and in front of windows. There are even scratching pads designed to fit on or around your furniture! Additionally, you could apply "Sticky Paws" or other inconspicuous adhesive products to your furniture to protect it from being scratched.

Clipping your cat's claws will also prevent unwanted scratching behavior and will prevent your cat's claws from growing too long and piercing their paw pads.

**For instructions on how to trim your cat's claws, visit [www.humanesociety.org/resources/trimming-cats-claws](http://www.humanesociety.org/resources/trimming-cats-claws)**