

Cat Scratching Prevention

Inappropriate scratching is the primary, if not only, reason why people still declaw their cats. However, few realize what declawing is, the side effects, or the alternatives. Declawing is an amputation of the first knuckles in a cat's paws. If done incorrectly, declawing can lead to a number of medical concerns, including regrown nails. When done correctly, there are still a number of medical and behavioral side effects including arthritis, chronic pain, irritability, increased aggression, biting, and litter box issues. Fortunately, there are alternatives!

- **Set them up for Success**

When cats scratch, they release a pheromone from their paws that marks their territory. Make sure you have multiple scratching posts in socially significant areas of the house, and possibly directly in front of furniture where you do *not* want your cat to scratch. If your cat spends a lot of time in the living room window, put a scratching post nearby.

- **Offer Variety**

Appealing scratching posts should be at least 30" tall to allow for full body stretching. Offer a variety of scratching posts- sisal rope, cardboard, soft wood, vertical, horizontal, diagonal... Notice how your cat likes to scratch, as well as where. If your cat consistently scratches on vertical surfaces, offer a tall scratching post. Refrain from using scratching posts that have any carpeted surfaces, as your cat may start to make an inappropriate association that it is okay to scratch on all carpeting.

- **Protect your Couch and Skin while you Learn**

While you learn where and how your cat likes to scratch, consider protective caps for the nails. Soft Paws or Kitty Caps are plastic covers that are glued to the nails and fall off as the nail grows. They can be purchased at most pet stores and were developed by a vet, so they do no harm if ingested. These are a great way to safely observe if, where, and how your cat wants to scratch so you can learn their preferences and provide appropriate alternatives.

- **Encourage Appropriate Scratching**

Some cats need help to learn where to scratch. You can rub catnip on the scratching post, encourage play on/near the post with a feather wand, scratch your nail along the post, or put a little special food treat on top of the post to encourage scratching. FeliScratch is a product designed specifically to encourage cats to scratch the post. It comes in the form of a dye that is placed on the scratching post. FeliScratch has an 87% success rate since releasing this product. Lastly, when your cat scratches the post, be sure to praise!

- **Deter When Necessary**

Sometimes cats are especially fixated on scratching a certain surface. In this case, along with attracting them to the RIGHT surface, you can use deterrents. Double-sided tape and an upside down vinyl carpet runners can create an unpleasant feeling for your cat if he/she tries to scratch. Cats are also repelled by the scent of citrus and Eucalyptus. Spraying these scents (diluted!) regularly on areas where you do not want your cat to scratch can also help deter him/her. Scented dryer sheets can also have this effect. Be careful not to let these scents get near scratching posts, feeding/drinking areas, or litter boxes.

If you have any issues with your cat not using the scratching post- or any other behavioral issue- contact the HAWS Behavior Department at (262)542-8852 ext. 204. HAWS offers complementary behavior consultations for the life of your HAWS adoptee. We are here to help!