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DECLAWING IN CATS

How is the declaw surgery performed?

Declawing (onychectomy) consists of surgical removal of the entire nail and nail bed of the front claws under general anesthesia. The surgeon may use a surgical instrument such as a scalpel or a CO2 laser to perform the procedure. The incision sites are closed using surgical skin adhesive or absorbable sutures. Often, the patient will be hospitalized for one or two nights. Oral antibiotics and/or pain medication may be prescribed for five to seven days after surgery. Most cats are “back to normal” within seven to fourteen days.

How should I take care of my cat after the surgery?

To ensure a safe and speedy recovery for your cat, follow these guidelines:

➤ Litter Box

Replace the normal granular litter with shredded strips of paper or a specially formulated dust-free pelleted litter for the first five to seven days.

If your pet refuses to use the paper litter, you may add one-quarter ($\frac{1}{4}$) cup of regular clay litter that has been shaken to remove any clay dust. **NEVER USE CLUMPING LITTER** during this period. This is important because small granules of litter can enter or adhere to the surgical sites and cause an infection or delay healing.

➤ Exercise

Restricting a cat's activity is difficult, at best. As much as possible, discourage your cat from jumping on furniture and counter tops for the first week after surgery by blocking the access to these areas. If you see your cat on a counter top or high furniture, help it down. Cats primarily use their back legs to jump up, but may injure the surgical sites when they jump down and land on their front paws.

➤ Bleeding

Occasionally a cat will break open one of its incisions and a few drops of blood may ooze out. The blood should clot rapidly and form a small scab. Notify the hospital if you



observe continuous bleeding from a surgical site. Do not attempt to clean the paws or administer any topical medications without consulting a veterinarian.

Are there any negative aspects to declawing my cat?

After declawing, it is advisable to keep your cat indoors. Some 10 scientific studies have shown that declawed cats are not at greater risk of getting bitten or injured in a cat fight. However, they may have a decreased ability to defend themselves against other predators if allowed outdoors.

Under what circumstances should I contact my veterinarian?

You should contact the veterinary clinic if any of the following occur:

- Your cat's feet appear very swollen or bleed frequently and profusely.
- Your pet is reluctant to walk after four to five (4-5) days at home.

There is a change in your cat's general health, behavior or if your cat stops eating for two consecutive days.

If you have any questions or concerns about your cat or the surgical procedure.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Ernest Ward, DVM
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