



Cat Behaviour Guide

Destructive Scratching



While scratching can be a frustrating and costly behaviour for pet guardians, it is normal and necessary behaviour for cats. Here are some recommendations for redirecting your cat's scratching to appropriate items in the house.

Why Do Cats Scratch?

There are several reasons why cats scratch, which can include:

- Removing the outer, worn nail sheath and exposing the new layer underneath.
- Communicating with other cats visually and through scent. Cats have scent glands on their feet, which releases a scent mark with scratching.
- Stretching leg and foot muscles, often occurring after resting.

It is important that you do NOT punish your cat for scratching household items. Redirecting your cat's scratching behaviour to a scratching post typically resolves this issue.

Scratching Posts

Here are some tips to help ensure that your cat uses their scratching post:

- Place the scratching post in an area that is easily accessible to your cat.
- If your cat is scratching a furniture item, place the post in front of it. This will help redirect your cat to the appropriate scratching item.
- Cats prefer materials that allow them to sink in their claws. Posts made from carpet, sisal rope, or corrugated cardboard are often preferable. If your cat does not scratch their post, you may have to experiment with different scratching post textures.
- The scratching post should be sturdy and tall enough to accommodate the cat's body length when fully stretched.
- Some cats prefer horizontal posts while others prefer vertical posts. Experiment with different scratching posts to find your cat's preference.
- Encourage your cat to investigate the scratching post by hanging toys or scenting the post (or toys) with catnip.
- If your cat's scratching post is heavily used and your cat begins to scratch other household items, replace the scratching post.



Cat Behaviour Guide

Destructive Scratching



Why NOT to Declaw Your Cat

Declawing or onychectomy involves amputation of the last digital bone on the front of each toe, which includes the nail bed and claw. This surgical procedure can result in acute and chronic pain and may be associated with emotional stress from the inability to scratch.

Some alternatives to declawing include:

- Providing appropriate scratching items or pheromone sprays like Feliway®.
- Trim your cat's claws every 1-2 weeks to keep claws blunt. Consult with a veterinarian or certified pet professional on how to appropriately trim your cat's nails. This procedure may not be appropriate for all cats and may require de-sensitization techniques to prevent stress during trimming.
- Humane nail covers. You may need to consult with a veterinarian or certified pet professional on how to appropriately apply nail caps or covers on your cat.

Additional Resources:

The Alberta Veterinary Medical Association (ABVMA) has voted to ban medically unnecessary surgical procedures, including declawing. Press release:

https://www.albertaanimalhealthsource.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/abvma_press_release_feb_24_2019.pdf

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) opposes elective and non-therapeutic partial digital amputation (PDA), commonly known as declawing or onychectomy of domestic cats. Position statement: <https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/documents/partial-digital-amputation-onychectomy-or-declawing-of-the-domestic-felid-position-statement>

Did You Know?

You can also ask us behavioural questions by emailing:
askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com

It takes approximately \$7 million to keep the Edmonton Humane Society operational for one year and 40% of these funds come from generous donations made by supporters like you. Please [Donate](#).