Declawed Cats

Declawing is the amputation of the cat's digits at the first knuckle. Declawed cats are often left in pain due to nail regrowth, potential debris left inside, infection, arthritis due to the change in spine angle, and more.

The practice of declawing is becoming more widely rejected by animal welfare groups and organizations, veterinary practices, and even being banned by cities, counties, states, and entire countries to perform the procedure as education about the surgery continues to grow.

The AWLA does not recommend declawing a cat for any reason other than due to a medical condition that may deem the procedure to be necessary. It is not uncommon for declawed cats to develop behavioral issues as a result of being declawed. If you have a cat who is declawed, then some common behavior issues may include:

- ***Eliminating outside of the litterbox:*** If any of the medical issues above occur, then elimination can become painful. If eliminating becomes painful for a cat, then they may begin to associate the pain with the litterbox, rather than the act of elimination itself. They will then choose to try a different area, or substrate, until they find something that does not hurt, so you may find them starting to eliminate in various different and changing places. Pain medication for management of pain can sometimes remedy house soiling. X-rays can also be performed to determine if there are fragments or an infection in your cat's paws. If so, then a veterinary surgeon may be able to perform another surgery to clean the paws up and reduce the pain.

- ***Fearful behavior:*** Without their front claws, cats have one less means to defend themselves, as well as removing their ability to climb vertical spaces, thus removing an ability and avenue of escape for them. This can lead to fearful behavior and often make a cat that either was or would have otherwise been social instead fearful and avoidant of people, other cats, and new situations.

- ***Aggression:*** Similar to the reasons for fearful behavior, aggression may occur if the cat is either in pain and/or feels as though they cannot defend themselves with their paws, so they may be quicker to resort to biting.

- ***General anxiety:*** In addition to potential pain and fearful behavior, cats who have been declawed cannot climb vertical spaces. This takes away a main escape route for cats. Cats also enjoy stretching and scratching as a stress reliever (much like dogs enjoy to chew) and climbing up to perch and rest in high places. Declawing removes the ability for cats to do these things, which may lead into increased generalized stress/anxious behavior.

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