THE CAT FANCIERS' ASSOCIATION, INC.

World's Largest Registry of Pedigreed Cats

CFA GUIDANCE STATEMENT ON DECLAWING

Declawing of Cats - CFA guidance statement
Approved by the CFA Board of Directors - October 1996 and revised June 2003
by Joan Miller
CFA Health Committee

CFA's Health Committee proposed the following guidance statement on the declawing of cats after review of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association's (CVMA) position concerning declawing, and after research of scientific articles and information from the Cornell Feline Health Center, from Joan Miller's files of cat fancy and animal shelter materials and by talking with veterinarians, feline behavioral specialists, The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), the President of the American College of Behaviorists and the Director of Ethical Studies at the San Francisco SPCA. At the October 1996 meeting, the CFA Board unanimously approved a guidance statement on the declawing of cats. A revised guidance statement was approved at the June 2003 Board meeting.

"The Cat Fanciers' Association recognizes that scratching is a natural behavior of cats and that cats may be defenseless without full use of their claws if they, either intentionally or unintentionally, go outdoors. Scratching damage to household furnishings can be minimized or avoided by routine clipping of the claws, the use of claw covers and by redirecting the cat's activity to acceptable surfaces.

CFA perceives the declawing of cats (onychectomy) and the severing of digital tendons (tendonectomy) to be elective surgical procedures that are without benefit to the cat. Because of the discomfort associated with any surgery and potential future behavioral or physical effects, CFA disapproves of routine declawing or tendonectomy surgery in lieu of alternative solutions to prevent household damage. In certain situations, including high risk of injury or disease transmission to owners with bleeding disorders or compromised immune systems, declawing may be justified in order to maintain the cat-human bond. "

Information summary

Surgical procedures:

The most common surgical procedure, **onychectomy, or "declawing"**, is amputation of the claw and the end toe bone joint. The surgery has a reputation for causing pain for a week or more and the possibility of postoperative complications, such as infection, hemorrhage, nail regrowth and altered

feeling in the toes for some time after surgery. There is disagreement as to whether declawing leads to behavioral problems in cats. There is concern for the welfare of cats who can not defend themselves or climb to safety if they are able to go outside. A declawed cat will still scratch but without damage to furnishings.

An alternative surgical procedure, deep digital flexor **tendonectomy**, was first described by John Rife, DVM (Journal AAHA, Jan/Feb 1988). This surgery involves severing the tendon attached to the end toe digit but maintaining the claw in the sheath. It is not possible to detect the surgery visually but the cat is no longer able to extend the claws. The technique limits the cat's ability to damage surfaces when scratching as long as the claws are kept trimmed. It is less painful (cats recover within 2 days) and it has minimal postoperative risks. However, ongoing claw trimming is a must or the cat can use its claws again to some degree and there is a risk of ingrowth into the paw pads. Some veterinarians have reported joint fusion and arthritis problems. The technique has not been favored by most veterinarians mainly because of the above negative factors and the potential of the client's dissatisfaction and ultimate desire for declawing.

Behavioral aspects:

Animal behaviorists currently believe that the main function of scratching for the cat is communication. It is natural, instinctual behavior. Scratching involves not only leaving a visual mark but it is an attention getting, happiness display. Ideally the cat should be encouraged in this behavior; however, because of damage to furnishings, most cat owners reach a compromise with the cat by claw clipping and redirecting to other acceptable surfaces or using the relatively new claw guards, and most cats are adaptable enough to accept this arrangement. In addition cats raised by pedigreed cat breeders can be deterred even further by early kitten handling. (My own experience indicates that scratching becomes an ingrained habit which initially surfaces at the time a 4 or 5 week old kitten becomes aware of the magic of its claws when he pulls himself over the kitten box. This is when all cat habits, like use of the litter box, start to develop.) Breeders can greatly minimize the scratching habit, and associated problems, by not allowing access to attractive home furnishing surfaces (i.e. fabrics, carpet) and by only making acceptable scratching surfaces available, such as cardboard or rope posts, until the kitten reaches the age of 8 to 10 weeks. Cattery raised kittens can have good scratching habits ingrained during this early period.

The majority of American veterinarians perform declawing surgery, either routinely suggesting it to clients or as a last resort for cats that would face euthanasia. Many cat owners who have their cats declawed because of a perceived cat damage "problem" have not even tried any other solution first. The veterinary scientific literature supports the claims that there are no differences in undesirable behaviors of cats before and after declawing. However, my reading of the studies, executed in the 80's, which are the basis of this belief, reveals that the investigators themselves admit that there may have been special circumstances involved and that the numbers of cats were too few for significant results. From one article it was stated that an "owner is more likely to undertake the expense of having a scratching cat declawed when that cat has many desirable traits". (Effects of declawing on feline behavior; Bennett, et al; Companion Animal Practice, Dec. 1988.)

There is no question that most humane shelters have taken a strong stand against declawing and there are numerous anecdotal reports of behavior problems in declawed cats. In some countries, such as Great Britain, declawing (except for medical reasons) is not permitted. Tuffs University School of Veterinary Medicine advocates thoroughly exploring noninvasive options and only if a client considers getting rid of the cat performing surgical removal The AVMA policy is as follows: "The declawing of

the domestic cat is justifiable when the cat can not be trained to refrain from using its claws destructively. (1994)"

At the October 1996 meeting the CFA Board of Directors also approved an addition to the showrules which disallows tendonectomy in show cats. The showrules also were modified to allow claw covers in the household pet class.

References:

1. John Rife, DVM , Journa of the AAHA, Jan/Feb 1988, vol 24, pg 73-76
2. Bennett, et.al; Companion Animal Practice, Dec. 1988, pg 7-12
3. AVMA policy - FAX to J.Miller
4. Canadian Veterinary Medical Association policy - FAX to J.Miller