

Dear Dr. Wise,

Question: I don't know what we're going to do if we can't get our kitten to quit clawing the furniture. I've tried cat repellent and yelling but nothing helps. We've grown quite attached to Buzz and would hate to get rid of him, but we can't have the furniture shredded. Any suggestions?

Answer: Buzz is doing what comes naturally, he's keeping his nails trimmed and sharpened. Most cats do their "manicuring" outdoors on trees or if they are house cats, on scratching posts. If Buzz insists on using furniture, you can try trimming his nails. Your final option is declawing.

Cats that are not accustomed to nail trimming may try to pull away when you handle their feet. You will be more successful if you start when the cat is quiet and relaxed. Move slowly. Stroke gently down the leg to the paw. By pushing down on the nail and up on the pad, you can extend the claw. Near its base you will see a pink area of live tissue (called the quick). Using clippers, snip the claw so the cut is parallel to the bottom of the cat's paw.

Be careful to avoid the quick. It can bleed and hurt a little if nicked. You can stop the bleeding with a styptic pencil or corn starch; or wait a few minutes and it will stop by itself.

Declawing is a permanent solution to unacceptable scratching. It may sound cruel to you, but in fact it is a relatively painless procedure which does not leave the cat handicapped in any way. Studies show that declawing does not change a cat's behavior. Currently, the procedure can be done with a laser which causes very little pain and recovery after the surgery is very quick.

If you have claws removed on all four feet, the cat should stay indoors since it would not be safe outdoors. If you remove only the claws on the front feet, the cat cannot scratch furniture but it still can climb and defend itself. A declawed cat is **not** more likely than usual to bite or abandon its litter box. They can become much more welcome members of your family.

If you have a question about your pet, write to Dr. Wise, 201 S. Capitol Ave, Suite 405, Indianapolis, Indiana, 46225.