



OVMA's position on Partial Digital Amputation (Onychectomy)

OVMA's Board of Directors recently endorsed the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association's statement on Partial Digital Amputation (PDA), which opposes elective and non-therapeutic PDA, commonly known as declawing.

WHY HAS OVMA TAKEN THIS STEP?

Veterinarians play an important leadership role in animal welfare. To fulfil that role, veterinarians must look out for the best interests of the animals in their care and, where necessary, provide a voice for those who do not have one of their own.

Declawing has often been used to prevent cats from scratching, but scratching is a normal feline behaviour. It allows cats to mark their territory, both visually and with scent, and assists cats with nail conditioning and whole body stretching, as well as balance, climbing and self-defence.

Surgical amputation of the third phalanx of the digit alters the expression of normal behaviours in cats, causes avoidable short-term acute pain, and has the potential to cause chronic pain and negative long-term orthopedic or neurological consequences. PDA procedures are currently banned in several countries and regions, including the United Kingdom, Europe and Australia.

OVMA has long opposed cosmetic alteration of companion animals, including canine ear cropping and tail docking. In keeping with that stance, OVMA has adopted this position to help educate pet owners about declawing, and encourage them to discuss alternatives with their veterinarian.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ONTARIO VETERINARIANS?

The adoption of a position opposing elective and non-therapeutic PDA by OVMA and CVMA does not impact Ontario veterinarians' ability to continue to perform declaws on their feline patients. However, it is hoped the Associations' stance will assist veterinarians who are reluctant to perform this procedure to speak to their clients about alternatives. OVMA has also shared this new position statement with the College of Veterinarians of Ontario.

WHAT SHOULD I SAY TO CLIENTS WHO WANT TO DECLAW THEIR CATS?

1. Clarify the exact nature of the surgery. The cat owner likely does not realize the surgery involves the surgical removal of the third phalanx of each digit.
2. Discuss potential risks to the cat. As with any surgery, PDA can result in complications due to chronic pain, and negative long-term orthopedic and neurological consequences, hemorrhaging and infection.
3. Talk about potential alternatives to declawing, such as:
 - providing scratching posts and other suitable scratching materials.
 - using feline pheromone sprays to redirect the cat to more desirable scratching materials.
 - using double-sided tape to deter cats from scratching the edges of furniture.
 - regular nail trimming (recommended every two weeks).
 - artificial nail covers (Soft Paws™ or equivalent).
 - environmental enrichment and appropriate daily play to decrease feline frustration.
 - avoidance of hand/foot play, which can lead the cat to see these human parts as prey.
 - the application of positive reinforcement of desirable behaviour, including the use of catnip, treats and verbal praise.



Your Source. Your Voice.

LINKS AND RESOURCES

For veterinarians:

- cathealthy.ca/protocols

For cat owners:

- cathealthy.ca/educational-materials
- partnersah.vet.cornell.edu/pet-owners/trimming-cat-claws
- partnersah.vet.cornell.edu/pet-owners/destructive-scratching-cats

Special thanks to OVMA's Small Animal Issues Committee and CVMA.

Questions? Please email info@ovma.org or call 1.800.670.1702.