



Onychectomy “Declaw” Discharge Instructions

Pets are members of the family and it is our pleasure and honor to treat your family member. Today your pet visited the hospital for an **Onychectomy** surgery (commonly referred to as a declaw). This handout is intended to educate pet parents about the procedure and the post-operative care your pet will require.

What is Onychectomy?

Feline declaw surgery (onychectomy) involves the permanent removal of the nails (usually the front feet only). The surgery consists of amputation of the toe bone up to the first joint and must be performed under general anesthesia. The procedure is usually performed to prevent cats from scratching individuals, and/or damaging furniture or other items by scratching. Although commonly performed, declaws are major orthopedic surgery.

Your cat will need special post-surgical care to recover as comfortably and quickly as possible.

Will my Pet be in pain?

General anesthesia was used throughout the procedure and your pet was given an injectable pain reliever after the surgery. Your pet's feet were bandaged overnight and additional pain medication was given during the hospital stay. Your doctor will dispense oral pain relievers and possibly oral antibiotics for you to give at home for the next few days to ensure that your pet is comfortable. Your pet may be reluctant to walk around, jump up on things or act sore. Some degree of discomfort is expected. In younger cats, pain experienced after the declaw procedure should lessen within 10 days and lameness (limping) should improve within one week. In older cats, this time frame may be longer. In **all** cats, due to individual pet differences, activity levels, surgical technique, and choice of pain medication, these time frames may vary. If you feel your pet needs additional pain medication, please contact your veterinarian as soon as possible. If Lake Shore Pet Hospital is closed, please contact a local emergency veterinary hospital.

Do not give your cat any type of human medication as they can harm your pet, and in some cases, cause death.

What can I expect when I bring my pet home tonight, and what do I need to do for him?

Your cat stayed in the hospital last night for observation and bandage removal this morning. Your cat will need to have someone home tonight to watch over him. Your doctor

may have used visible external sutures or surgical adhesive, depending on surgical technique, personal preferences and the needs of your cat. It is normal for your pet to be sleepy and less coordinated this evening. If these symptoms persist tomorrow morning please contact your veterinarian. If you have any trouble administering the medication sent home for your cat, please call Lake Shore Pet Hospital.

Watch your cat for the following signs:

- Completely unresponsive/inability to stand
- Redness, swelling, pain or extreme warmth of the feet
- Refusal to eat or drink for more than 12 hours
- Lethargy or disorientation after the first day home
- Excessive licking or chewing of the incisions or feet
- Discharge or bleeding from incisions on the feet
- Your Pet removing a suture within the first 7-10 days (if external sutures are present)
- Severe vomiting/diarrhea or ongoing vomiting and diarrhea
- Coughing or irritation of the throat. Coughing in Pets often sounds like they are trying to vomit. Often they retch at the end and may produce some spittle.

If you notice that your pet has any of these symptoms contact your veterinarian immediately as they may be signs of serious post-operative concerns. If Lake Shore Pet Hospital is not open, seek immediate assistance at a veterinary emergency center. We recommend the Anne Arundel Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care emergency hospital whose phone number is 410-224-0331.

Special diet instructions: You may continue food and water as usual unless otherwise instructed by your pet's doctor.

Special incision care and limited play: Your cat must be discouraged from jumping as much as possible the first few days. Jumping could open the incisions and bruise the tissues. A pelleted (non-clay) litter such as Yesterday's News paper (shredded newspaper available in PetSmart) must be used for 10-14 days post surgery to prevent kitty litter from getting in the incisions. Please check the feet daily, keep the area clean and dry, and discourage licking and chewing of the paws. In most cases you should not have to clean the incisions but if they seem dirty or there is discharge, please notify your veterinarian immediately.

What can I expect the week following surgery and what do I need to do for him/her then? Unlike people, pets can not be told that they've had surgery and need to "take it easy and keep an eye on their incision site". Most cats are ready to be their active selves the day following surgery, although a few may act sore or stiff for several days. It is extremely important to discourage your cat from the following activities:

- **Licking/chewing at the incision sites!!** When your cat is unattended they should wear an Elizabethan collar (cone). Pets can open up incision sites **very** quickly, and the pain of doing so does not always discourage them. Licking or chewing at the site can cause

infection, delay healing, and even require additional surgery. Repair of the surgical site can be twice as expensive due to the damage caused! So keep an eye on your pet at all times and place an Elizabethan collar on them when you can't. Especially at night.

- **Going outside.** Declawed cats have severely limited defenses and abilities to climb. We recommend they become indoor- only cats after surgery. You need to keep your cat indoors, and strictly limit their exercise, for at least the next 14 days.
- **Getting the incisions wet.** No baths for 10-14 days.

If you notice any of these symptoms, or have any questions or concerns about the health of your pet, please contact your veterinarian. The Lake Shore Pet Hospital team will want to check your pet's incisions and paws in 7-14 days. If present, any external sutures may be removed at that time as well, or the doctor may decide to let the suture dissolve/fall out on their own.