



Experts recommend that you trim your cat's claws every two weeks or so. It's best to do it when she's relaxed.

Painful Results

One such consequence, he points out, is an ingrown claw (otherwise known as onychocryptosis), a condition in which an overgrown claw curls and cuts into an animal's paw pad. This condition can occur in any of the toes but is usually found in one of the two dewclaws, the comparatively small and essentially non-functional structures that are located on each of a cat's front ankles.

"An ingrown claw," says Dr. Miller, "is bound to be very painful and can become a serious problem if it becomes infected. Because cats are grooming animals, they can usually relieve an ingrown nail themselves by chewing and licking at it. But attentive owners can spot an ingrown nail and have it treated by a veterinarian."

Owners who allow a cat's claws to become overgrown are at risk for serious consequences themselves, Dr. Miller points out. "A cat's claws can carry many disease-causing bacterial, fungal and viral agents," he says. "So if a cat that has long claws leaps into your lap and digs its claws into you, it's possible that your skin can be punctured and one of these agents can be delivered deep into your tissues."

One disorder that can be transmitted in this way is the appropriately named cat-scratch disease, a bacterial infection that causes swelling of the lymph nodes and is especially threatening to people with compromised immune systems.

Starting Early

Owners should routinely monitor the condition of an animal's claws and make sure that claws are appropriately trimmed. "It's an easy thing to do," says Dr. Miller, "especially if you begin the process when the cat is a kitten. If you've developed the routine, you can

Care for Your Cat's Claws

Claws that grow too long can pose a serious health threat to a cat — and her owner, as well. Here's why.

The typical cat will spend up to 18 hours a day sleeping and as much as 50 percent of its waking hours meticulously grooming itself. In addition to persistently licking its coat in order to keep it clean and free of dirt and parasites, the animal will pay special attention to its claws, which serve it well as invaluable tools and, when the need arises, as formidable weapons.

"A cat in the wild uses its claws for a wide variety of purposes," says William Miller, VMD, medical director at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine. "It will use them to scratch its skin when it itches, mark its territory, provide traction when it wants to

climb a tree trunk, or dig a hole to go after a mouse. A cat will also use its claws to conceal its scent from predators by scratching dirt over a spot where it has urinated or defecated."

In the course of their routine activities, most cats — especially those that spend a lot of time outdoors — will be able to maintain their claws at proper length, notes Dr. Miller. Cats that live mainly indoors will usually be able to accomplish this as well if they have access to a sturdy scratching post. In some cases, however, a cat's claws can become too long, a situation that can have harmful implications for the animal and possibly its owner.

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use an emery board. Just snuggle the cat in your lap while you're watching TV or relaxing, and do a couple of claws

each night. Or you can use a mechanical clipper and do it every two weeks or so."

Of course, he adds, "Some cats will fail to see the humor in this activity and

will bite and scratch. In that case, you'll have to take the cat to a veterinarian or a professional groomer who will know how to deal with the animal." ❖ By Tom Ewing

How to Trim Your Cat's Claws

Dr. William Miller recommends that a cat's claws be examined and trimmed every two weeks or so. Although a veterinarian or professional groomer can certainly be utilized, most owners are capable of doing it themselves.

Following are some pointers on claw trimming presented in a video on the subject produced by the Cornell Feline Health Center and available on the Internet at http://partnersah.vet.cornell.edu/pet/fhc/trimming_claws:

- ◆ Do the trimming when your cat is relaxed or sleepy.
- ◆ Have all equipment that you'll need — such as clippers, emery board and styptic powder or pencil — on hand before starting the procedure.

◆ Sit down and snuggle your cat in your lap or, better yet, have the cat lie down or stand on a slippery table top. (The cat will have less traction if it tries to escape.)

◆ Hold up a paw; grasp it gently and press it closely against your body; place your index finger under the toe pad and your thumb securely on top of it.

◆ Squeeze your thumb and index finger together to extend the claw.

◆ Using the clipper, cut about halfway between the end of the claw and the quick — the pink, sensitive tissue at the base of the claw. If you happen to cut into the quick, don't panic. There may be some bleeding, but if you apply styptic powder, the wound will soon heal.