

How to Trim Cat Claws, and Why You Should

Cats derive direct benefits from having their nails trimmed by people as well. Cats' nails grow in layers that are like shells. When cats "sharpen" their claws, they are removing the older shells to expose the sharper new ones. However, often cats do not successfully remove the shells. This can lead to ingrown nails that can become extremely painful and can lead to nasty infections. Regular nail trims prevent ingrown nails. Furthermore, a cat with trimmed nails is likely to enjoy a better relationship with her family, since she won't be ejected from laps merely for making kitty dough.

Setting the Mood

Ideally you should introduce your [cat](#) to nail clipping when she's a kitten. Choose a chair in a quiet room where you can comfortably sit your cat on your lap. Get her when she's relaxed and even sleepy, like in her groggy, after-meal state. Take care that she isn't able to spy any birds, wild animals or action outside nearby windows-and make sure no other pets are around.

Make Friends with the Paw

Gently take one of your cat's paws between your fingers and massage for no longer than the count of three. If your cat pulls her paw away, don't squeeze or pinch, just follow her gesture, keeping in gentle contact. When she's still again, give her pad a little press so that the nail extends out, then release her paw and immediately give her a treat. Do this every other day on a different toe until you've gotten to know all ten.

1. Know the anatomy of cat claws

Most cats have 18 nails (five on each front foot and four on each rear foot). However, a condition called polydactyly, in which cats have supernumerary digits, is quite common. Get to know your cat's feet, and know where the nails are and how many there are. Also, remember that cats' nails naturally retract while at rest. They can be extended for trimming by applying simultaneous gentle pressure on the top and bottom of each toe. Practice this and get good at it. Finally, know the quick. The quick contains blood and nerves that feed and provide sensation to the nails. If you trim a nail too aggressively, you will cut into the quick. This causes pain and bleeding. The quick can be identified by its pink or red tinge (caused by the blood flowing through it) at the base of the nail. The quick does not generally extend through the entire nail.

2. Habituate the cat to holding still and having her feet handled

Cats very rarely resent nail trims unless the quick is struck. However, many cats do not like to hold still and have their feet handled. I recommend that cat owners handle their cat's feet every day. If your cat is used to having her feet handled, the job will be much easier. Kittens are especially amenable to this habituation, but it works for many mature cats as well. You can practice extending the nails while you are handling the feet.

3. Try to make the nail trimming experience pleasant, and don't fight

Tuna, petting and soft voices go a long way. If your cat starts to get angry, abort the procedure. Cats have remarkably good memories, and if you fight with her to trim her nails, I can assure you that the procedure will only get more difficult over time.

4. Work as a team

This is the veterinarian's ace in the hole. I almost always work with another person when performing a feline nail trim. Holding the cat is the harder job because it requires a great deal of finesse — the goal is to restrain the cat without her knowing that she's being restrained. It should be done gently and lovingly, but a good restrainer won't let the cat get up and walk away (unless she starts to get angry).

5. Don't waste time

Very few cats will tolerate a 10-minute nail trim. Know what you're doing, respect the anatomy, and don't bumble around. If you're good the nail trim will be over before the cat even knows she's being restrained.

6. Use the right equipment and use good technique

One person should gently restrain and reassure the cat. The other person should quickly extend each nail and use an appropriate nail trimmer (conveniently, human nail trimmers work fine) to remove the tip of each nail. Move smoothly through the nails on each foot. When in doubt, it is better to remove too little nail than too much. The sharpest part of the nail is at the very end, so only a bit needs to be removed anyway. If you accidentally hit a quick, apply corn starch or a commercial powder such as Kwik Stop to control the bleeding.

Remember that with nail trimming, as with so many things in life, practice makes a big difference. If you set your mind to regularly handling and trimming your cat's nails, you will most likely get good at it. Trim claws about every 3-4 weeks.



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