

HOW SOFT PAWS® CAN HELP PROTECT YOUR FURNITURE

One day back in the '90s, Toby Wexler, DVM, was building a swingset in the back yard. The family terrier, Scooter, was, as usual, jumping up and scratching everyone's legs. Dr. Wexler noticed the safety caps that covered the screws on the swing set. He picked up a couple and popped them onto Scooter's toes. Although the caps soon fell off, they did stop Scooter from scratching when he wore them.

Now, about twenty years later, thousands of dogs and (especially) cats wear the product Soft Paws®, which resulted from that day of experimentation in Dr. Wexler's back yard.

Soft Paws® are hollow vinyl caps shaped like claws that glue onto a cat's real claws. Coming in different sizes and colors, they can be used on both front and back paws and stay on for about six to eight weeks. "They are a safe alternative to declawing," says Dr. Wexler, who has a private veterinary practice in Lafayette, LA. "They are easy to apply, and most cats tolerate them well."

How Safe is Safe? *The caps are made out of a nontoxic vinyl that is used in medicine, such as in IV tubing and heart valves, says Dr. Wexler. They are too small for cats to choke on and will not be absorbed if a cat eats them. The adhesive that glues the caps on is called cyanoacrylate, which is used in tissue-bonding during surgery.*

While artificial nails for humans can cause extreme nail thinning and infections, Soft Paws® do not pose the same risks for cats' claws. Cats' claws are different than human nails, says Dr. Wexler. While humans need eight months to replace a nail, cats replace their claws every eight weeks. "When you put Soft Paws® on your cat's nails, the nail keeps growing — and the nail and cap move as a unit." In fact, he says, the caps move away from the base of the nail a little more each day as the nail grows normally, ensuring breathability to the nail. When you change the cap, the outer sheath of the old nail comes off and there's a brand new nail underneath. "Basically, it's the same process when your cat scratches the couch — except that this way there's no damage to the furniture."

Generally, cats adjust well to wearing Soft Paws®, says Dr. Wexler. To his knowledge, adverse reactions or allergies are very rare. The only uncommon potential problems exist for older cats and cats with hypothyroidism that don't shed their claws normally. "Soft Paws® are not a substitute for proper nail care and trimming," says Dr. Wexler. "You need to check your cat's nails; they should be trimmed and the caps removed every six to eight weeks."

Your cat may take a little while to get used to Soft Paws®; your cat is apt to bite at them the first time he wears them. Some may fall off, and you'll need to replace them in order for your cat to get accustomed to wearing them.

But your cat will be able to do everything he did before, says Dr. Wexler — stretch, retract his claws and "scratch at" your furniture. The only thing he'll miss is your constant scolding when he reaches for your couch or rug. And that's not such a bad thing. For more information, go to www.softpaws.com.

