

The act of trimming your cat's nails can seem like a daunting task, but there is good news: A team of people working with a cat can get a nail trim done in 20 seconds flat. A little trickier is doing this alone, but rest assured, it can be done! Unfortunately, there is also bad news: Many cats are not tolerant of nail trims, and many people are not skilled in the process. Below are some pointers that will hopefully help cat owners keep their cats' nails trimmed.

1. Know those nails!

Most cats have 18 nails (five on each front foot and four on each rear foot). 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 to get comfortable with the process. Finally, know the quick. The quick contains blood and nerves that feed and provide sensation to the nails. If you trim a nail too short, 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. Try to make the experience pleasant, and don't fight

Tuna, treats, petting, and soft voices go a long way. Anything that your cat finds comfort in, be it toys dangled in front of her, treats, or simple gentle, loving attention can help during a nail trim. If your cat starts to get upset, stop trying. Cats have remarkably good memories, and if you fight with her to trim her nails, it's possible that the procedure will only get more difficult over time. If you can only manage a few nails at a time, that's fine. Come back to it when your cat has had time to relax and calm down.

3. Work as a team

Whenever possible, enlist help to perform a nail trim. Holding the cat is the harder job because it requires a bit of finesse -- the goal is to hold the cat without her knowing that she's being restrained. It should be done gently and lovingly, but a good holder won't let the cat get up and walk away (unless she starts to get upset). This can be done with the cat wrapped in a towel, if that's comforting, or as simple as the cat laying on your lap. Holding the cat still or simply distracting the cat long enough that they don't know a nail trim is happening will be key to a successful trimming session.



Extend one paw at a time and gently squeeze the pad until the nails are extended.

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 had a manicure. Again, if she gets upset, stop trying!! Take up the task later on, when she has had time to relax.

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 to remove the tip of each nail. There are a few different types of trimmers available. There is a small scissor type trimmer that may be more comfortable for you to use as well as a "guillotine" type trimmer. In either case, it's important that the trimmers not be dull. Dull blades can result in the nail shattering, which will make a proper nail trim difficult and painful for the cat. Extend one paw at a time and gently squeeze the pad until the nails are extended. Trim the tip of each nail off and 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. If you accidentally hit a quick, apply corn starch or a commercial powder such as Kwik Stop to control the bleeding. Rewarding your feline companion with her favorite treat after the trimming session has ended is a great way to remind her that good things happen when her nails are trimmed!



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.