

Inappropriate Elimination

Your cat is trying to communicate something to you with this behavior. Cats are instinct-driven to use the litter box. When they do not, it because the associate it with pain (often the case in health issues) or because they have responded to something upsetting in their environment this way and are attempting to tell you of their unhappiness.

Physical Condition-Based

Your first stop should be at your vet to be sure you are not dealing with a bladder/kidney infection, diabetes or other medical issues. Statistically, 70% of the inappropriate elimination cases we see are based on a medical condition.

It is a vital step in the process that you take your cat to the veterinarian for an exam to rule out or identify physical causes. If you do not have a veterinarian or would like us to refer you to one, we'd be happy to do so. We work with many excellent vets all over Houston. Often, an inexpensive urinalysis will identify a problem that is equally inexpensively remedied.

Behavior-Based

The remaining 30%, however, fall into the behavior-based category.

However, once any medical disorder has been ruled out or an acute problem is under control, it's time to assess your cat's behavior from a holistic perspective. Cat consultant Annie Bruce figures more than half the calls she receives are about cat urination problems. She contributes stress as the leading cause of litter box problems, which can be brought on by emotional, environmental, as well as physical problems.

Adding another human or feline family member is certainly a common cause. Below are some tips for managing inappropriate elimination when it is based on a message of unhappiness a cat is trying to communicate. Cats live in prides in the wild but are predominantly solitary animals. An addition to a pride is not easily tolerated. That instinct to separate from a new member can be overcome and we have had a great deal of success counseling people through it.

Poor diet and lack of exercise

A dry-food-only, unbalanced or unvaried diet can contribute to kidney, liver, or bladder problems. Allergic reactions to certain foods may also prompt problems. The quality of your cat's food matters. Some pet foods are such poor quality they almost guarantee health problems. If you'd like some recommendations about food, talk with your vet or let us know and we'll send you information about the content of some popular brands and what types you may want to consider.

- Change. Disruption in daily routine and their environment-moving, new family additions, vacations, can be very stressful to some cats. Look at your house from your cat's point of view. Really think about scent, sound, visual changes, inhabitants, furniture, paint etc. what is not upsetting to you because you reason through it and understand it may be distressing for your cat who doesn't have 'the big picture.'
- Declawing. Declawing makes it difficult for a cat to cover its waste and causes chronic pain often causing greater litter box problems. If your cat is already declawed, discuss with your veterinarian changing to a softer litter or whether she thinks pain management is in order. For the future, don't declaw.

Stressful environment

Violence, overcrowding, loneliness, boredom, sharp smells, loud noises or humans arguing extensively make a cat's life stressful. Cats respond to their environment and communicate their unhappiness. They can't leave us a post it or ask for counseling. Going outside the litterbox is often an attention-seeking mechanism.

Litter box

A dirty litter box, one in a poor location, or even an electronic cleaning one may repulse, frighten, or intimidate a cat into refusing the litter box. How often do you scoop/dump your litterboxes? If the cat box has a lid, remove it. If the cat box is a "deep" one, get him a shallower one - some cats simply don't like to climb in. If he has any weakness in his back legs, climbing in might be difficult for him. Place the litter box (or a second box) directly over the area he pees on. Then, slowly move it to the desired location.

Other possible issues:

- Territorial challenges. Seeing or smelling a strange cat around their home can send a cat right into litter box retaliation. Overcrowding can also result in territorial pressures. Overcrowding doesn't have to be the hoarder on the news. Depending on the cat, two may be too many.
- Bad chemistry. Not every cat fits into every home and may not adjust to the new environment of other people, cats, dogs or other pets.

Preventing Indiscriminate Elimination Problems

Make sure your cat is eating a quality diet with vitamins and supplements and a wide variety of foods, plus spending daily time with you that includes playtime and your undivided attention. If your veterinarian is concerned that your cat is at

risk for FUS, discuss preventative natural remedies that address urinary tract crystals, infection and irritation.

Improve the litter box experience by offering enough litter boxes: one box per cat, plus one, and cleaning at least once a day. Don't forget to make sure the area around the litter box is clear for easy access. Try different litters and box sizes, and allow your cat to choose his preference. Remember cats may not find scented litter as appealing as you do, and that east-to-use scoopable litters have been associated with health problems. And, if your cat is older or arthritic, make sure the sides of the box aren't too high.

If your cat is urinating in potted plants or on personal items, take precautions. Cover the dirt with pinecones or decorative rocks and don't leave dirty clothes or bad-smelling articles out. Some cats will urinate on items they find offensive. Neutralize offending urine odor so as not to attract a cat to urinate there again.

Recognize that if your cat has had a bout of FUS, he may view the litter box as the cause of the pain. You may need to change the box, litter or location before he's "comfortable" again.

If your cat is spraying:

- If you haven't done so, spay or neuter your cat.
- Reduce overcrowded situations and use play therapy to reduce tensions between cats. Consider calming herbal formulas, flower essences, or homeopathy to help reduce accompanying anxiety and to help address behavior and territorial issues.
- Keep a scratching post near a window or door to help relieve frustration or anger. Consider a low, horizontal scratching board, scratching horizontally is another way a cat will mark territory. Or keep a bed by the window so that your cat can watch and protect the house, he may feel less threatened if he can see outside.

These are just a few of the issues and solutions to the difficult problem of indiscriminate urination and spraying. Fortunately we are learning more and have access to many new therapies. Classically trained veterinarians have some medical options at their disposal but nothing is a substitute for your creating a safe, calm, attentive and welcoming home for your cat. It is important to bring as much information as you can to your consultation with your veterinarian. There are drug therapies now that have been helpful to some cats including a low dose of Prozac. Again, is it important to understand that this should be a last resort. Far higher on your list than drugging him out of it should be trying to understand and address the message your cat is sending.

Another option is to contact an animal behaviorist with experience in cat behavior problems; take advantage of the many new books on cat behavior; and make sure you discuss alternative therapies, such as acupuncture, chiropractic,

Tellington Touch, flower essences, homeopathy, and herbal remedies with a holistic veterinarian. (Dr. Lore Haug is a local behaviorist. www.texas.vetbehavior.com)

Have lots of litter boxes! Have a minimum of two, more if your house is large. If you have more than one kitty, make sure you have one box for each additional kitty, preferably in separate rooms. You might also try giving him a choice of another brand of litter, cats really do have preferences. And keep them clean. You can use deodorizers, but overuse can result in rejection of the box. Cats hate to pee in dirty litter boxes, so of course when they have polyuria, the litter boxes seem to always be dirty. This may mean changing or scooping the litter every day (or even more), but it beats the alternative.

Does your cat always return to the same areas to pee? If so, be aware that even a healthy cat that has been peeing outside the litter box may return to the scene of the "crime" and continue to pee there, as it now smells like a place to urinate. (A cat's sense of smell is so much more sensitive-- you may not smell it at all, but she does...she can smell it at 1 part per million concentration) You may need to reclean these areas with an enzyme treatment that actually eliminates any residue. And if the pee was on the carpet, you may need to lift the carpet and treat the pad underneath. Simple Solution, available at Petsmarts, is a cleaning solution that really works on this issue.

- If your cat has a severe problem, you may want to confine her to an easily cleaned, no carpets portion of the house until she gets better regulated, and/or until you reclean any areas. (This way you can also test if the problem is with her diabetes and lack of regulation, or if these pee'd on areas are simply designated "litterbox" because they retain the pee smell and need to get recleaned. Often, kenneling a cat in a very large dog kennel --in the house ofcourse--with a bed/food/water and a litter box for a period of 2 weeks will reacquaint them with the use of the letterbox. The cat should be brought out for attention while you are supervising and crated when you are not. This method has been successful for many people--myself included.

Here are some reader suggestions for dealing with cat urine on your carpet:

We recommend Nature's Miracle or Simple Solution. Whichever product you use, make sure it is enzyme based. These treatments do not harm carpets, and are great to keep around to quickly care for accidents. These are available to most Petsmarts.

To make the homemade version:

Take a 2 liter club soda, pour out 1/2 cup and replace it with 1/2 cup white vinegar; soak the area with this solution, then wet a towel large enough to cover the area with solution and cover area. Walk on towel to pick up surface odor/stain. Replace with another towel. The first day you may need to replace the towel 2 or 3 times. When the towel comes up clean with no stain or odor the

treatment is done. It is a pain but seems to work - you might want to try a small area first.

Reward your cat with a little treat when you see her using the box. Put something perfumeey (kleenex soaked in aromatic oil works really well) wherever her favorite "NO" spots are. Hang in there! This is a family member and while it is frustrating, we all go through times with our families that are difficult. Please allow us to work with you through seeing this feline family member through this time and back to being a valued member of the family.



Feline Behavior Problems: House Soiling

House soiling is the most common behavior problem reported by cat owners. It includes urination and/or defecation outside the litter box, as well as urine spraying.

Why do cats eliminate outside of the litter box?

One common misconception is that cats soil in inappropriate places for revenge. It is tempting to conclude, "He defecated on the living room carpet to punish me for leaving him for the weekend." But this kind of calculation requires sophisticated cognitive abilities that cats aren't believed to possess. Furthermore, this conclusion assumes that cats view their urine and feces as distasteful, when in fact they do not. It is only we humans who view it that way.

Medical Problems

So why do cats urinate or defecate on your bed or carpet? Medical problems are one possibility. Inflammation of the urinary tract may cause painful or frequent urination, inability to urinate, bloody urine, and crying during urination. An affected cat is likely to eliminate outside the litter box if he comes to associate the box with painful urination, or if he has an increased urgency to urinate. In addition, kidney, liver, and thyroid diseases often lead to increased drinking and urination. Inflammation of the colon or rectum, intestinal tract tumors, intestinal parasites, and other gastrointestinal conditions may cause painful defecation, increased frequency or urgency to defecate, and decreased control of defecation. Age-related diseases that interfere with a cat's mobility (for example, arthritis, nervous system disorders, or muscular diseases), or with his cognitive functions can also influence his ability to

get to the litter box in time. In short, any medical condition that interferes with a cat's normal elimination behavior can lead to house soiling.

Litter Box Aversions

Behavioral problems, such as litter box aversions, inappropriate site preferences, or urine spraying can also lead to house soiling. An aversion implies that there is something about the litter box that your cat finds unsavory. It could be the box, the litter, the location of the box, or all three.

Something about the litter box bothers your cat.

- The box contains harsh odors. The litter box may have an offensive odor if you clean it with harsh chemicals. Or, if you don't clean it enough, the box may smell strongly of ammonia (a normal byproduct of urine). In either case, covered litter boxes hold in and amplify such odors.
- The sides of the box are too high. Cats with painful legs, sore joints, or other mobility problems may have trouble getting into a box with high sides. Kittens have similar problems.

Something about the litter bothers your cat.

- The litter is dirty. Cats usually prefer clean litter.
 - The texture of the litter is distasteful. Your cat may have a preference for finer-textured clumping litter over coarser non-clumping litter—or vice versa.
 - The scent of the litter is unpleasant. Most cats prefer non-scented litter.
- The location of the litter box bothers your cat.
- The box is in an unpleasant area. Avoid placing the litter box in a high-traffic, noisy, dark, or dank area.
 - Your cat is afraid to use the box. If another cat, dog, or human terrorizes your cat when she's in the box, or ambushes her as she exits, she may avoid the box altogether.

Cats with aversions usually eliminate on varying surfaces. You may find puddles of urine and/or feces on either soft surfaces like carpets, beds, or clothing, or on hard, shiny surfaces like tile floors or bathtubs.

Depending on the severity of your cat's aversion, he may continue to use the litter box, but only inconsistently.

Inappropriate Site Preferences

Your cat may develop a preference for eliminating in a spot other than the box. Preferences can be categorized as follows:

- Another surface is more desirable for elimination. Cats that prefer certain surfaces usually stick with that choice. For example, a cat that

finds it more pleasing to eliminate on soft surfaces like clothing or carpets would be unlikely to use tile floors.

- Another location is more desirable for elimination. This usually results from an aversion to the current box location.

As with aversions, cats with preferences for certain surfaces or locations may continue to use the litter box inconsistently. One cause for house soiling may lead to another. For example, a cat with a urinary tract disorder that can't make it to the litter box in time will urinate wherever she is. She may then develop a preference for the new site and continue to eliminate there.

Urine Spraying

When your cat rubs against your leg with his face, or scratches his scratching post, he is also depositing his scent from the glands in his cheeks and paws. Another equally normal but less pleasant marking behavior is urine spraying--the deposition of small amounts of urine around a given area. Spraying announces a cat's presence, establishes or maintains territorial boundaries, and advertises sexual availability.

Cats usually spray on vertical surfaces, like the backs of chairs, or walls. They don't squat to spray (as they do to urinate), but the tail lifts and quivers, and small puddles of urine are left in several consistent locations. Cats that spray are usually unneutered males and, to a lesser extent, unspayed females, but 10% of neutered males and 5% of neutered females also spray. In households with more than seven cats, the likelihood of spraying is high.

Cats may spray when they perceive a threat to their territory, such as when a new cat enters the home, or when outside cats are nearby. New furniture and carpet smells can prompt spraying as well. Cats may also spray out of frustration resulting from factors—like restrictive diets, or insufficient playtime—often wrongly perceived by humans as revenge.

My cat is not using the litter box reliably. What should I do?

First, address the problem promptly. The longer the behavior persists, the more likely it is to become habit. If you have more than one cat, you may need to separate them until you can identify the responsible party. Alternatively, your veterinarian can provide you with a special non-toxic stain given by mouth that will show up in the urine. In cases of defecation outside the box, you can feed one cat small pieces (about twice the size of a sesame seed) of a brightly colored non-toxic child's crayon that will show up in the feces. If you find urine puddles in the house, it is important to distinguish between spraying and other forms of house soiling. Watch your cat for signs of spraying—or set up a video camera when you're not around.

Once you have identified the house-soiling cat, it is wise to take him to your veterinarian for a thorough physical examination and appropriate

diagnostic tests to see if there are underlying medical problems. Cats with medical conditions may not always act sick. Once medical causes have been ruled out, your detective work begins. Here are some patterns that may point to a cause:

- Is there one type of surface upon which your cat eliminates? If so, she may have a preference for certain surfaces, and you can modify your litter to match it. If she likes soft surfaces like carpeting, buy a softer, finer litter, and put a carpet remnant in her box. If she has a penchant for smooth, shiny surfaces, consider putting tiles in her box, covered with only a small amount of litter. Over time more litter can be added.
- Is there a certain location she prefers? She may have developed a preference for a new area because something bothered her about the old area. Try placing a litter box in her "preferred" location. Once she reliably uses it, gradually move the box just a few inches a day back to the desired location. Stop moving the box if she stops using it; instead simply move it back to the spot where she last reliably used it, then gradually begin moving it again.
- Is yours a multi-pet household where another animal terrorizes your cat while she's in the litter box or as she exits? If so, the cat may be afraid to use the box. If you currently use a covered box, replace it with one that gives her a 360-degree view. This will give her more confidence while she's in the box and make her less prone to ambush. Also, position the box so that she has more than one way out (i.e. don't have the box surrounded on three sides). Finally, place multiple boxes in multiple locations to give your cat more options.
- When your cat uses the box, does he cry, refuse to bury his waste, perch on the edge of the box without touching the litter, or eliminate right near the box?
- If so, first be sure the box is clean. Some cats refuse to use a box containing any urine or feces whatsoever; meticulous litter box cleanliness is necessary for these individuals. (See "Keeping the Litter Box Clean.")
- Your cat may dislike the litter you use, especially if you've recently and suddenly changed brands. If you must switch brands, do so gradually, adding more of the new litter to the old with each cleaning. Most cats prefer their litter unscented, and an inch or two deep.

The box itself may be the offender. Larger cats need bigger boxes, and kittens and elderly cats need boxes with low sides. Although humans like covered boxes for reducing odor and stray litter, from your cat's point of view, covers hold odors in, and restrict his view of the area. You may need to purchase several types of boxes and several types of litter to determine which combination your cat likes best. Finally, provide as many boxes as there are cats in the house—plus one. For example, if

you have two cats, there should be three litter boxes. This decreases competition and gives each cat a box of his or her own.

How can I stop my cat from spraying?

Because spraying is different than other types of house soiling, different tactics are necessary to manage it. First, because there are often hormonal components to spraying, any intact animal should be neutered or spayed. Next, identify the stimuli that cause your cat to spray. If outside cats are responsible, motion detectors that trigger sprinklers can be used to deter them from coming onto your property. Additionally, you can discourage your cat from looking outside by closing blinds or shades, or by placing double-sided tape or electronic mats that deliver mild shocks onto your windowsills.

Address possible sources of frustration that may be causing your cat to spray. For example, introduce a new diet gradually, or discontinue it until the spraying is under control. Increasing the amount of playtime for an under-stimulated cat may also help ease frustration.

Spraying can also result from territorial disputes between cats in the same household. They may need to be separated and reintroduced slowly, using food treats to reward and encourage peaceful behavior.

Applying odor neutralizers anywhere your cat has sprayed may prevent him from spraying there again. Another useful commercial product is Feliway®, a synthetic pheromone that, when applied to household surfaces, mimics the scent of cat cheek gland secretions. Many cats will not spray on areas that have this scent. (See the end of this brochure for information on where to purchase the above-mentioned products.)

Will medications stop my cat from house soiling?

Spraying is more responsive to anti-anxiety drugs than other types of house soiling. However, medication is only part of the solution, and must be used in conjunction with environmental changes. In studies at leading vet schools including Tufts and Cornell, Prozac has been found to have better than a 90% effectiveness rate at treating inappropriate elimination. The medication is inexpensive and had no side effects at all in the vast majority of cats. Consult your veterinarian about whether she thinks this may a viable option for your cat.

What can I use to clean my cat-soiled carpet, couch, and other household items?

Cats will re-soil and spray areas previously impregnated with their scent. Therefore, cleaning up your cat-soiled belongings is important, not only to undo the damage, but to break the cycle of elimination. Because it is much easier to eliminate odors in recently-soiled areas, clean them as soon as possible. A cat's sense of smell is far keener than ours; therefore odors must be neutralized, not just deodorized.

However, avoid cleaning products containing ammonia or vinegar—they smell like urine and can be irritating.

What other methods should I consider?

- Sheets of plastic, newspaper, or sandpaper, electronic mats that deliver harmless, mild shocks, or a carpet runner with the nubs facing up may all discourage your cat from entering a soil-prone area.
- Try changing the significance of a soiled area. Cats prefer to eat and eliminate in separate areas, so try placing food bowls and treats in previously soiled areas. Playing with your cat in that space and leaving toys there may also be helpful.
- Try denying your cat access to a given area by closing doors, or by covering the area with furniture or plants. Baby gates will not keep a cat out of a room.
- Catch him in the act. A bell on a breakaway collar tells you his whereabouts. If you can catch him within the first seconds of his elimination routine, startle him with a water gun or shake a jar of pennies, so that he associates being startled with those actions. It is important that you startle rather than scare him; fear will only worsen the problem. Moreover, if you catch him after he's eliminated, your window of opportunity is gone—you must catch him just as he's about to eliminate.
- Never hit, kick, or scream at a cat. Not only does this create more anxiety, which may contribute to house soiling behavior, but also such tactics provide no link between the "crime" and the punishment. Some owners resort to rubbing their cat's face in their excrement to "teach the cat a lesson." This is completely ineffective, first because cats do not view their urine and feces as distasteful, and second, because even moments later, cats cannot make the connection between the mess on the bed and this kind of punishment.

Conclusion

A common and frustrating problem, inappropriate elimination can be difficult to control. A full resolution depends on early intervention, followed by detective work to determine the cause of the behavior, and time and effort on your part to solve the problem. In partnership with veterinarians, both cats and the people who love them can live in harmony and good health.

Helpful hints for preventing litter box problems

1. Choosing an appropriate litter and box
- Most cats prefer unscented, finer-textured litter, at a depth of one to two inches.

- Young kittens, elderly cats, and cats with mobility problems need boxes with low sides.
- Overweight and large cats need bigger boxes.
- Most cats prefer an uncovered box that lets odors escape and allows a 360-degree view of their surroundings.
- Have as many litter boxes as cats in the house-plus one.

2. Choosing a good litter box location

- Most cats prefer a location that is quiet, private, separate from their feeding area, and easily accessible 24 hours a day.
- Do not locate the litter box up or down stairs if your cat has trouble climbing.
- Place multiple boxes in different areas of the house.

3. Keeping the box clean

- If you use clumping litter, remove feces and clumps daily and add clean litter as needed.
- A liner may help keep the box cleaner, but many cats don't like them.
- To clean the box, scrub it with a gentle detergent, dry it, and refill with clean litter. Litter should be changed often enough so that it looks and smells dry and clean. The more cats using the box, the more often this will need to be done.
- Replace old boxes that smell or are cracked.

Suggested cleaning products and resources

Cleaners/Deodorizers

Anti-Icky-Poo (AIP)

Bug-A-Boo Chemicals

11924 NE Sumner

Portland, OR 97220

Nature's Miracle

Pets 'N People Inc.

27520 Hawthorne Boulevard, Suite 125

Rolling Hills Estates, CA 90274

(Also available at most major pet stores)

Outright Stain and Odor Removal Products

The Bramton Company

P.O. Box 655450

Dallas, TX 75265-5450

Oxyfresh Pet Deodorizer
Oxyfresh USA, Inc.
P.O. Box 3723
Spokane, WA 99220

Pheromone Spray

Feliway
Abbott Laboratories
1401 North Sheridan Road
North Chicago, IL 60064

Electronic Mats

Scatmat/Scarecrow Motion Activated Sprinklers
Contech Electronics, Inc.
P.O. Box 115
Saanichton, British Columbia
Canada V8M 2C3

PetMat
Radio Systems Corporation
5008 National Drive
Knoxville, TN 37914

Motion Detectors

Scarecrow
The Dog's Outfitter
1 Maplewood Drive
Hazleton, PA 18201
(Motion detector that turns on a
sprinkler when activated)



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