

How to Prevent Litter Box Problems

Under normal conditions, your cat will like to use its litter box based on instinctual needs. Changes in your cat's litter box behavior can almost always be traced to **a medical condition, stress, or something she dislikes about her litter box environment**. Fortunately, a little know-how and preventative maintenance can greatly reduce the chance of litter box problems.

But First...

- Never punish or yell at your cat for not using its litter box. **Cats don't speak English.**
- Any acute or prolonged signs of litter box difficulties, such as urinating more frequently, avoiding the litter box, or **straining**, could indicate an **urgent** medical condition; call your veterinarian immediately.

The Perfect Litter Box Environment

- **Location.** Place the litter box in a pleasant, convenient location, easy to access, away from noisy or high-traffic areas. Some cats, especially older or handicapped cats, prefer a litter box on each floor of the house. Beware of putting the litter box directly on soft carpet; for some cats, the adjacent carpet feels like litter. Use a minimum of **one litterbox per cat**.
- **Litter.** Every cat has a favorite litter, this may take time to figure out. Keep the kitty's box filled with about two inches of litter, unless directed otherwise by the package. When changing litters, do it gradually over several days, or fill a second box with new litter.
- **Type of box.** Some cats don't care for covered litter boxes. If you use a covered box, remember to scoop and clean often, as odors can be trapped inside. Keep in mind some male cats will urinate horizontally instead of down. As with litter, your cat will help guide you in your selection.
- **Clean!** Scoop clumping litter at least once a day, for the happiest cat. Wash the litter box regularly and replace the litter weekly. Use a mild soap and rinse well. An occasional 1-part-in-10 bleach solution is fine if you rinse thoroughly. **Stay away from ammonia and citrus-scented or strong-smelling cleaners when deep cleaning.**
- **Routine.** Once you and your kitty find a system that you are both comfortable with, **"stay on course."**

Cats derive comfort from a predictable routine; if major changes such as a move or a new baby are inevitable, this can cause behavioral litter box issues. Gently and

gradually acclimate your kitty to new places or people, and maintain its routine as much as possible.

Monitor Kitty's Litter Box Habits

Get to know your cat's eating, drinking, and bathroom habits, and be alert to any changes. When you scoop, do a onceover on the litter box contents. Occasionally watch your kitty in the act, as long as you don't bother her. Stools should be brown, not immediately hard and not runny, and a reasonable amount of urine should be deposited. Your cat should seem comfortable when using her litter box and digging in the litter. There is some room for natural variation in these behaviors-when in doubt, call your vet.

Special Cases

- **Kittens** should be introduced to the litter box early. If your kitten goes outside the box, wipe up the waste with a paper towel, put the towel in the box, and help kitty cover up-she'll catch on.
 - Find out what litter the kitten was using and use that or something similar until you decide what to use.
 - Avoid scoop able when it comes to kittens. The dust can clog up airways and lead to Upper Respiratory Infection (URI).
- **Declawed cats** might be more reluctant to dig in the litter and may require a lighter litter, as their paws are more sensitive.
- **Older, handicapped, and injured cats** will appreciate shallower litter boxes.

Remember that all cats have personalities and preferences, take the time to learn about what your cat likes and it will make for a strong bond!