



## **Inappropriate Elimination In Cats**

Inappropriate elimination is a toileting behavior. A check with a veterinarian is needed before assuming that it is behavioral. The goal of a vet visit is to ensure your cat is not refusing to use her litter box because of any underlying medical conditions. **It is never safe to assume that the root cause of going outside the litter box is behavioral**, as cats instinctually want to use the litter box.

Urinating in odd places can mean a behavior problem, a territorial marking problem, or some sort of social or environmental problem, and sometimes the differences are not clear cut. Several factors may be in play and some conditions involve medical symptoms resulting from psychological stress.

### **Good Indicators That You Should Seek Vet Help**

- Your cat is going outside of the litter box.
- She strains when she is using the litter box.
- She yowls when she is using the litter box.
- She has blood in her urine.
- She makes frequent trips to the litter box, with little to no production.

Any of these behaviors should warrant a vet visit. When you take your cat to the veterinarian, **ask for a urine analysis**. Urine analysis is the first step to helping your cat feel better and be able bodied enough for a litter box. This test checks for numerous probable causes for lack of litter box use, such as **urine crystals, urinary tract infections (UTI) and stones, all of which can cause strenuous litter box activity**.

**If you have been to the vet, and no medical condition has been found, now you can explore a behavioral cause.**

There are many causes for inappropriate elimination, such as litter type or location, trauma associated with the litter box, type of litter box, etc.

### **Ask Yourself These Questions for a Step in the Right Direction:**

- Is your cat depositing urine on vertical or horizontal surfaces?
- Are you finding large or small amounts of urine or feces?
- Is your cat still using the litter box or has use decreased or stopped entirely?
- Does your cats stand or squat when she is urinating outside the litter box?

### **Your Cat May be Marking if...**

- She is depositing urine on vertical services in small amounts, she is still using the litter box, and she is standing up while urinating.

## Your Cat May be Displaying Inappropriate Elimination if...

- She is depositing large amounts of urine and/or feces on a horizontal surface, is no longer using the litter box, and is squatting to go to the bathroom.

## Here are Some Tips to Help with Your Cat's Inappropriate Elimination

- **Litter type** – Some cats are very picky about the type of litter they prefer. Experiment to determine if the litter you are using is the cause of the inappropriate elimination. Some cats do not like litter that is scented. Some are bothered by litter that is too coarse. You can try a variety of litters including clumping, clay, pellets, paper, etc.
- **Depth of litter** – Most cats prefer to have several inches of litter to dig around in. In some cases though, some cats prefer less litter. Experiment with which your cat prefers.
- **Linens, scented litter, & harsh chemicals** – Cats can smell much better than people, so the use of cleaning products and scented litters can be very offensive. Scents alone are enough to prevent your cat from using her litter box. If she can smell odors from chemicals you have used to clean the litter box or from the litter itself, she may elect to go to the bathroom somewhere else. In addition, plastic litter box liners can get caught on her claws while she is scratching and it is noisy, which may bother her.
- **Number of litter boxes** – the number of litter boxes you provide for your cat(s) matters! The rule of thumb is one litter box per cat, plus an additional one. For example, if you have three cats, you should give them four litter boxes. These litter boxes should be spread out in order to consider them separate litter boxes. Even in a single cat household, providing two litter boxes is vital, as some cats prefer to urinate in one litter box, and defecate in the other.
- **Type of litter box** – Many cats dislike covered litter boxes, especially in multi-cat households. Covered litter boxes prevent her from feeling like she can protect herself from being ambushed by other cats. Many of the litter boxes available for purchase are too small for an average sized cat, let alone a large cat. In general, the length of the litter boxes you provide should be at least 1.5 times the length and width of your cat. If your cat is too big for the largest litter box you can buy, try purchasing a large plastic storage bin and cut a hole in the side for an entrance. **If your cat does not feel safe in her litter box, she will not use it!**
- **Trauma associated with the litter box** – If your cat has ever experienced something painful or scary while in the litter box, she may begin to associate that negative experience with the litter box and avoid using it to go to the bathroom. For example, if a child, dog, or other cat in the household has bothered her while she was trying to use the litter box, or she has had a medical condition which has made urinating or defecating painful, she may begin to avoid the litter box for fear of experiencing that pain or terror while in the box.

## Tips to Help with Inappropriate Elimination

- **Keep the litter box clean!** – Cats do not like going to the bathroom in a dirty space, and if the only clean place to go eliminate is the laundry hamper, for example, that is where she will resort to going.
- **Wash the litter box(s) weekly** – Use mild dish soap to fully wash the boxes every week.

- **Location** – Where you place the litter boxes in your house is very important! Cats want to go to the bathroom in quiet, low traffic areas. Do not place them by loud appliances or where people congregate. They want privacy! Keep the litter boxes away from their food and water. They will not want to go to the bathroom where they eat. Also, make sure there is a litter box in the same room where she is eliminating inappropriately. If you have a multi-story house, make sure she has litter boxes on each level.
- **Clean the soiled areas** – Once she has soiled an area outside of her litter box, she will be more likely to continue to go there again. Use enzymatic cleaner meant for urine to clean those spots.
- **Cat Attract** – Use this product that gets added to the litter to encourage her to use her litter box.