

Feline House-Soiling

House-soiling is one of the most common reasons why pet owners abandon or relinquish their cats. Unfortunately, these cats frequently end up in shelters where they often are euthanized. House-soiling can be a complex problem to solve, but there are ways to prevent, manage, or resolve feline house-soiling behaviors. Your cat does not urinate or defecate outside the box due to spite or anger towards you, but because its specific physical, social, or medical needs are not being met.

4 BASIC CAUSES OF HOUSE-SOILING

Environmental and Social Factors

- Cats are very clean by nature and need unsoiled areas to eliminate.
- Some cats may avoid using a litter box located in a high traffic area.
- In a multi-cat household, the presence of a more dominant cat near the litter box area may cause a less confident cat to go to other places.
- House-soiling may occur if a cat had a bad experience while it was in the litter box (e.g. someone administered medications, dirty litter box)

Marking Behavior

- Urine spraying is a normal part of feline behavior in which a cat marks to leave its scent. Other marking include scratching and rubbing.
- Unneutered males and unspayed females will mark as part of their sexual behavior. Spaying/neutering radically reduces this.
- Anxiety-related marking occurs in response to a change in the cat's environment, especially the area where the cat eats, sleeps, and plays.
- Cats often target items with new smells such as backpacks and shoes.
- Marking behavior at windows/doors usually means the perceived threat is coming from outside the home. Marking in stairs, hallways, doorways, or the center of rooms usually indicates stress from inside the home, such as other pets or new people, children, or remodeling.

Medical Causes and Problems

- Every cat that starts to house-soil requires a thorough physical examination and urinalysis to check for medical problems such as infections, cystitis, arthritis, kidney problems, diabetes, and others. Additional tests such as a urine culture, abdominal radiographs, ultrasound, blood and fecal tests are sometimes also necessary.
- Feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD) is a common medical cause of house-soiling. Cats have increased frequency of urination, difficulty and pain when urinating, and can have blood in their urine. This inflammatory condition can increase and decrease in severity over time and is aggravated by stress, changes in diet, and other issues.

TREATMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF HOUSE-SOILING

Management of litter boxes is critical for encouraging good toileting habits. When house-soiling occurs always evaluate the litter box.

Number – The general rule of thumb is to have one litter box per cat plus one extra, kept in multiple locations around your home.

Location – Take a look at where your litter boxes are located:

- Avoid placing food and water close to the litter box.
- Cats usually prefer quiet, private places. Avoid rooms where cats will be startled by sudden noises from nearby loud appliances.

- Avoid busy areas of the home and locations where a cat could be cornered, blocked off, or unable to flee. If one cat prevents another cat's access to the litter box, it can be very stressful and cause the cat to house-soil because the victim is avoiding or cannot get to that location.

- Keep the litter boxes apart in different locations because your cat considers boxes close to each other as one large litter box.

- If a cat is toileting away from its box, try placing an additional box at the new site (temporary or permanent) to get the cat using a box again.

- In a multi-level home, place a litter box on each level. If you have an older cat, place a litter box on the level where the cat spends the most time, as it may not be easy for the cat to use stairs to reach the litter box.

Size – Typically, bigger is better and without lids. Boxes should be 1.5 times the length of the cat from nose to tail base. Alternatives to commercial litter boxes include storage containers. Older cats need low entry (you can cut down a side but check for sharp edges).

Litter – Provide a kitty cafeteria: multiple boxes with different litters and variable litter depths and allow the cat to choose. Many cats dislike dusty aromatic litters and box liners. Most prefer unscented clumping litters.

Managing the Litter Box – Scoop at least once a day and add litter as needed. Wash the litter box every 1-4 weeks using soap and hot water only. Avoid strong chemicals or any ammonia-based products.

Remove Marking Triggers

- Neuter/spay your cat to eliminate sexually-related marking behavior.
- Outdoor roaming cats encroaching on the household can act as triggers. *Tips:* if your cat never goes outside, use a motion activated water sprinkler to make the yard unattractive to other cats. Placedouble sided tape in front of sliding glass doors creates an uncomfortable surface and may dissuade other cats from sitting too close.
- Remove cat doors that allow roaming cats to enter the household.
- Clean urine-marked areas frequently to reduce a cat's habit of refreshing its scent on the site. Use a black light (UV) to find soiled areas and clean them with an enzymatic cleaner. Clean a large area to remove the odor (may be up to three times the size of the soiled area).
- Avoid using ammonia-based cleaners, which smell like urine to a cat.

Additional Considerations

- Ensure that all your cat's environmental needs are being met. For more information, visit: www.catvets.com/cat-owners/brochures or www.icatcare.org/vets/guidelines.
- Never punish your cat for house-soiling. Punishment can lead to fear-related aggression, reduces the bond between cat and human, and encourages urine marking in less obvious areas.
- Consider use of comforting synthetic pheromones. Spray Feliway® on affected areas after cleaning to reduce re-marking. Adding a Feliway® diffuser in the room most visited by the cat adds feeling of security.

Feline house-soiling can be a frustrating problem. Resolution requires patience, as it can take some time to determine what is causing these behaviors and may involve making changes to several aspects of a cat's home environment and care. If you are experiencing house-soiling with your cat, please contact your veterinary practice immediately. The sooner these issues are addressed, the happier everyone will be, including your cat. Working with your veterinarian to identify the causative factors for the house-soiling behavior, and effectively addressing those factors, will dramatically increase the chance of resolving the house-soiling issues. By understanding and providing for your cat's environmental and medical needs, you can help your cat to live a long and happy life.

You are an important member of your cat's healthcare team. You can be instrumental in helping with the success of treatments and improved healthcare.

