

# Feline Inappropriate Urination



Although by nature cats are clean and fastidious, cat owners commonly report poor elimination habits. Inappropriate eliminations may begin in kitten hood or may become a problem in the mature, box-trained cat. The behavior may reflect a medical problem rather than be psychologically motivated, so don't procrastinate if you detect inappropriate urination.

Unquestionably, the most common cause of inappropriate urination by a mature, box-trained cat is feline lower urinary tract disease (also known as feline urologic syndrome or FUS, Cystitis, "Bladder infection"). 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.

Once your cat is given a clean bill of health, house soiling is then considered a behavioral problem and it is necessary to search for a cause and solution to the inappropriate eliminations. Psychological stimuli for these behaviors may be separation anxiety, jealousy, insecurity, fear, anger, reaction to owner's stress or simply some confusion regarding the litter box. Hormones and territorialism also play a role in spraying or marking therefore an intact animal should be spayed/neutered. Environmental changes that can trigger these responses are:

- a new pet in the household
- a change in the disposition of the litter box
- moving to a new residence
- construction in the home
- prolonged absence of the owner
- the arrival of a baby or new human to the home
- outdoor cats spraying near the house or appearing at windows
- overcrowding of cats in a household
- Stress from flea infestation

Whenever possible try to identify and correct the change that initiated the behavior, some things you might try are: find a new home for the stray cat outdoors, close off rooms where he may be visible from windows, find a companion (human or cat) for those lonely periods you are away or reduce the number of cats in the house.

**NOTE:** The belief that cats soil in inappropriate places because they are angry with their owners is a common misconception. This type of calculation requires sophisticated cognitive abilities that cats do not possess. In addition, unlike their human companions, cats do not view their urine or feces as distasteful. Do not try to punish your cat! Hitting the offender or rubbing his nose in the "accident" may further increase anxiety or anger and exacerbate the problem. Even worse, these actions, or forcing the cat into the litter box, may simply make your cat more fearful of you and the box. Alternatively, a loud noise or water squirted from a spray bottle at the exact moment of the misdeed can be very effective.

When the cause of the problem cannot be resolved or modified, or the behavior continues despite your best efforts, the appropriate principles of behavior modification need to be applied. Behavior modification, for the most part, consists of making the litter box more attractive for use, and decreasing the attractiveness of eliminating elsewhere. Has the litter box been altered in any fashion before the problem began? If so, and if possible, return things to the way they were.

## **The Litter Box**

- Most cats prefer an uncovered, unlined box that lets odors escape and allows a 360-degree view of their surroundings. Overweight and large cats need bigger boxes and young kittens, elderly cats, and cats with mobility problems need boxes with low sides that can be accessed without having to go up or down stairs.
- Ideally, an owner should provide one litter box per cat plus one. Place the litter boxes in various locations that are quiet, private, separate from the cats feeding area, and easily accessible 24 hours a day. Use an unscented, finer-textured litter, at a depth of one to two inches. Feces and clumps should be removed daily with clean litter added as needed. Cat Attract is a litter additive which can be mixed into your regular litter and contains a scent that naturally attracts kittens and cats to use the litter box.
- To clean the box, scrub it with a gentle detergent, dry it, and refill with clean litter. Do not use cleaners that contain ammonia or vinegar (ammonia is a component of urine and vinegar will inactivate some feline odor eliminating products). Litter should be changed often enough so that it looks and smells dry and clean. Replace old boxes that smell or are cracked.
- Cats that eliminate on the carpet may have developed a habit of scratching carpet before doing their business. Building a carpeted shelf around the litter box or placing a carpet square in the litter box under the litter may satisfy this urge.

## **The Environment**

- Use a commercial product for eliminating cat urine odor, such as Bionihilator. Lingering odors of urine and feces in the wrong places may encourage more misbehavior. Extensively soiled carpet or rugs may need professional cleaning or should be replaced.
- Prohibit access to the area(s) being soiled by closing doors, rearranging furniture or placing boxes at those sites. Pick up objects (clothes, shoes, rugs, rags) that the cat typically soils.
- Try placing food and water dishes or toys in the area of inappropriate urination.
- Change the texture (and tactile experience) by covering the site with a thick plastic drop cloth or sheets of aluminum foil. A plastic tablecloth temporarily in place of the bedspread (if it is the target) may dissuade your cat.
- Spray lemon scented air freshener or another strong odor in the area of inappropriate elimination. Mothballs in a nylon stocking (to prevent accidental ingestion) may also work.
- 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.
- The confinement method may be applied in more difficult cases, particularly with kittens that seem to lack basic litter box instincts. Confine the cat to a small area large enough to contain bedding and food and water bowls on one end, and a clean litter box on the other end (a cage is perfect, or a very small bathroom or closet). Few cats will soil their own bedding or dining area. After a minimum of two weeks confinement (four to six weeks may be necessary) allow supervised time out of confinement, and initially return to “lockup” when you are away from home or at your own bedtime. Once your cat is regularly eliminating properly, he can have complete freedom again.

**Prompt intervention may prevent the problem from becoming an unbreakable habit. A full resolution requires working with your veterinarian to determine the cause of the behavior, and time and effort on your part to solve the problem.**