



# Litter Box Problems

## Why do cats stop using their litter box?

A sudden change in your cat's litter box habits means she is trying to tell you something is wrong. She may be in physical discomfort, or she may be reacting to a change in her environment.

No matter what the reason, please do not wait and hope the problem will just go away. Although she may start out suffering from illness or anxiety, her behavior can quickly turn into a habit if left untreated. Unfortunately the result is often making the cat a strictly outdoor pet, or getting rid of her all together. That's why the best way to curb inappropriate elimination is to begin treatment as soon as you see the behavior developing.

There are a variety of reasons why a cat would decide to use a corner of your bedroom instead of her litter box for her toiletries. Cats are very susceptible to stress when things change. That can include a new family member moving in, a move to a new house, a death or divorce in the family, the addition of a new pet, new furniture, etc.

You will also need to find out if the cat is spraying urine to mark territory, or if it's just squatting to urinate in a new location. Many cats begin marking as a result of sexual maturity. Spaying or neutering by 6 months of age cures most cats of this hormonal desire. If the cat is neutered and is still spraying, he is trying to let other cats in the household know that this is his turf.

### Where do you begin?

The first step in finding out why your cat is urinating in the house is to take her in for a thorough exam by one of our veterinarians. Before you start working on any behavior problems you **must** make absolutely certain that your cat is not having a medical problem.

#### Physical Problems

There are a variety of physical conditions that could make a cat stop using its litter box including the following:

Parasites - Constipation - FUS (feline urological syndrome) - Impacted anal glands - Bladder infections or stones - Feline leukemia - FIP (feline infectious peritonitis) - Kidney failure - Food allergies  
Diabetes

### How can you stop your cat from inappropriate elimination?

If, after a visit to the veterinarian, you determine that the problem is not medical, there are some things you can try at home to make the cat want to use its litter box again.

Your first step should be cleaning up the areas where the cat has urinated. The best products for this are Outright\* Stain & Odor Remover, and/or a mixture of white vinegar and water (dilute one cup vinegar to one gallon of water.) If the urine has been there a while you will probably need to treat several times. Treating these areas will decrease the chance of the cat being attracted back to eliminate in the same place over and over.

Please keep in mind that you will not correct your cat's litter box problem with punishment! This will only confuse the cat and most likely make the situation worse.

## Tips to lure your cat back to the litter box...

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- ♦ If you add a new cat to your family, you should also add another litter box. The general rule of thumb is to provide one litter box per household, and one litter box per cat (2 cats = 3 litter boxes, 3 cats = 4 litter boxes, etc).
- ♦ Try a different style of litter box, one covered and one uncovered or different heights. Some older cats may be developing arthritis and it's painful for them to step into a litter box with taller walls.
- ♦ Try a different litter--clay, sand, newspaper strips, etc. If you change brands, however, gradually replace the old litter with the new one over a five-day period. Beware of litter material that contains heavy deodorizers or perfumes. How can you tell if the cat doesn't like the current brand of litter? Watch your cat, if she stands on the rim of the litter box or eliminates right beside the box she is probably trying to avoid contact with the offensive litter.
- ♦ Keep the litter boxes in quiet, convenient locations, away from the household bustle of adults, kids, dogs, etc. Remember that cats do not like to eliminate in the same area where they eat and drink.

*Please remember that your cat is not trying to make you angry or get back at you. He is simply avoiding something he deems as unacceptable. The key to solving his discomfort with the litter box is to seek help quickly. A well-established habit of urinating in other areas of the house is often very difficult to correct.*

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## Behavioral changes

Once you discuss the cat's history with a veterinarian, he can help you decide what things to try. If the physical changes, such as switching the type of litter, do not work, you will need to confine the cat to one room with the litter box. Patience is the key here. It may take a week, or it may take six weeks, for the cat to adjust to the routine use of the litter box again.

Always keep the litter box clean. Many cats are very particular about cleanliness. That means scoop the box daily and completely clean the box every week.

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## Definite "no-no's!"

- ♦ Do not ever strike your cat when she's around her litter box.
- ♦ Do not medicate, groom, or do anything else that the cat perceives as unpleasant around the litter box.
- ♦ Do not use strong smelling disinfectants to clean the litter box, especially anything containing ammonia.
- ♦ Do not change your cat's diet unless recommended by a veterinarian. Anxiety coupled with a change of diet could cause diarrhea.
- ♦ Never rub the cat's nose in urine or stool if it misses the box.



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