

## Feline Inappropriate Elimination Disorder: House-Soiling

Inappropriate elimination also known as house-soiling, are terms that mean a cat is urinating and/or defecating outside of the litterbox but somewhere else inside the house. It is the most common behavioral complaint of cat owners and the number one reason why cats are euthanized. Inappropriate elimination also includes marking behaviors such as spraying or horizontal urination in small amounts. Spraying and marking behaviors are covered in a separate handout.

Most inappropriate elimination cases can successfully be treated. The chances of success greatly increase if the problem is recognized in the early stages of development. Cases that are diagnosed as behavior problems are treated with behavior modification techniques and some require drug therapy for success to be reached and maintained. If drug therapy is required, the goal of the medication is to be used on a short-term basis and closely monitored by your veterinarian.

There are hundreds of reasons why a cat may eliminate outside of her litterbox. The first and most important is a medical condition. If your cat stops using her litterbox, immediately contact your veterinarian and schedule an appointment for your cat to be examined. There are a multitude of medical conditions that could be linked too and cause inappropriate elimination.

The reason(s) why your cat may stop using their litterbox is based in some form of stress and anxiety. The following is a list of reasons why a cat may stop using her litterbox:

- ✓ A medical condition: contact your veterinarian immediately
- ✓ The litterbox is not clean, the type of litter is irritating, the size of the litterbox is objectionable, plastic litterbox liners are being used, the box is covered or uncovered, location aversion
- ✓ A new person (especially a baby) in the house
- ✓ A person has recently left the house, permanently or temporarily
- ✓ New furniture, carpet, or drapes
- ✓ Rearrangement of the furniture
- ✓ Moving into a new house or apartment or remodeling
- ✓ Conflict between household pets
- ✓ A new pet has been introduced into the home
- ✓ A pet has recently left the house
- ✓ Your indoor cat can see or hear a neighborhood cat outside

- ✓ A cat “in heat” in the neighborhood
- ✓ A dog in the neighborhood that can be seen or heard by your indoor cat
- ✓ Some perceived stress or anxiety in the cat’s environment

**Treatment for inappropriate elimination or house-soiling:**

- ✓ Rule out a medical condition
- ✓ **Never Use Punishment!** This only makes the problem worse. Do not rub your cat’s nose in it or take them to the “spot” and yell or hit them. This will only teach them to fear you and your approach.
- ✓ If you catch them in the act of eliminating inappropriately, make a noise to startle them but do not scare them. Then gently take them to their litterbox
- ✓ Reward the cat with a treat, pet, or praise anytime you see them use the litterbox
- ✓ Increase the number of litterboxes. There should be one litterbox per cat plus one more. A three-cat household should have four boxes
- ✓ Add more boxes in different locations. Give your cat every opportunity to use a box. Place different textures of litter in the different boxes. Keep the existing box in the normal location in case your cat wants to return to it
- ✓ Implement the use of *Cat Attract*: a litter that has an herbal drawing agent that will “draw” your cat to the litterbox. Research has shown success with this scoopable brand of litter.
- ✓ The boxes **MUST** be kept meticulously clean. Scoop the boxes 1-2 times a day
- ✓ Caution using plastic liners
- ✓ Covered boxes vs. uncovered boxes
- ✓ No deodorized litters
- ✓ Clean boxes with hot water and mild dish soap
- ✓ Try a different type or brand of cat litter. When the new litter is added, be sure to use a new box with the new litter. Do not remove the old box at this point. Use the new litter in the new box for at least 10 –14 days before determining if the cat is using it
- ✓ Location of the litterbox may be an issue. Is it too dark? Are there loud noises? Has the cat ever been punished or medicated around or near the box?
- ✓ Is the cat being attacked or antagonized near the box by another household pet?
- ✓ Move food and water bowls to the areas being targeted
- ✓ Clean the areas with an odor-neutralizing product. It is critical to completely remove the odor from a previously soiled area
- ✓ Increase exercise and mental stimulation: Play with your cat in the areas she is likely to target
- ✓ Move a litterbox to the area(s) being targeted
- ✓ Make the targeted area unpleasant such as using aluminum foil, scent deterrents, plastic carpet runners turned over, or double sided tape
- ✓ It may be necessary to limit the cats’ access to the majority of the house while working on retraining



- ✓ Implement the use of *Feliway* spray or a *Feliway* Diffuser
- ✓ Before the problem will improve, each stressful environmental factor will have to be addressed. A behavior modification program will have to be designed and implemented to address these issues
- ✓ Pharmacological therapy may be needed in addition to behavior modification. Medication alone will not be beneficial

It is not easy but with patience and consistency, many cats with house-soiling or spraying disorders can be helped. Do not set your cat up to fail with your desire for a quick answer and response to treatment. Work with your cat and a professional behavior consultant to help rehabilitate the problem and improve the relationship with your cat. Remember to always rule out a medical concern first.

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