

# NEWSLETTER



## House Soiling

House soiling is the most common behavioral problem associated with domestic cats. There are a variety of reasons why cats eliminate outside litter boxes. Often, there are medical causes, such as lower urinary tract inflammation or urinary tract infection, as well as behavioral issues. It is important for you and your veterinarian to thoroughly discuss all aspects of your pet's medical history and environment when trying to determine the cause(s) and what action to take for your unique situation.

### Medical problems

Frequent or painful urination, endocrine *diseases* causing increased thirst, chronic inflammatory bowel disease, and even arthritis *pain* may make getting to or into the litter pan difficult. A thorough physical examination, laboratory evaluation and urinalysis may be necessary to rule out these conditions and to plan treatment.

### Litter Box Aversions

Cats are hundreds of times more sensitive to *odors* than humans. Studies tell us that scented litter is a 'risk factor' for litter box

### Quick Facts:

*Inappropriate house soiling is the most common behavioral problem seen in domestic cats.*

*A systematic approach includes:*

- *Ruling out medical problems including lower urinary tract pain, GI pain, and metabolic diseases like diabetes.*

- *Determining if housemates or stray outdoor cats are causing territorial stress.*

- *Determining box and filler preference as well as location preference.*

- *Replacing litter pans regularly and scooping daily to keep the box clean and attractive to the cat.*

- *Cleaning previously soiled areas with enzymatic cleaner to prevent the cat from returning to the soiled areas.*



aversion. Heavily soiled boxes also are a source of aversion. Cats may prefer certain litter textures as well.

In addition, the box itself may be distasteful to the cat. Many cats do not like covered litter boxes. The cover can trap *odors* and may not get scooped often enough. Cats who cannot see outside the box may fear a sneak attack by a housemate upon leaving the covered box. Some of the automatic boxes frighten cats if they activate while the cat is near by. Older cats may be unable to comfortably *access* a pan with high sides. However, cats who don't squat to urinate may need high sides to their boxes in order not to urinate over the top.

Lastly, the *location* of the box may be objectionable. Cats prefer low traffic, quiet, well lit areas for placement of a litter pan.

### Formulating a plan

Remember that cats do not soil for spiteful reasons. Do not punish your cat as you will only increase stress. Cats do not associate punishment with the previous act of soiling in the area. In multiple cat homes it is important to determine which cat is soiling and why. Medical testing is important to rule out disease. Also, if medications might be considered, it is absolutely necessary to establish that your cat is healthy enough to take them without side effects.

### Make soiled areas less

**attractive:** locate and clean all soiled areas with enzymatic cleansers to remove odors. You may place foil, plastic, sandpaper, or upside down carpet runners to keep your cat away from the area. Changing the purpose of the 'soiled' areas can help. Cats do not soil in areas where they eat: placing food and water in these areas can help, as can playing with the cat in the area. Moving furniture, closing doors, and using baby gates to limit access to areas associated with soiling can help.

### Make litter boxes more

**attractive:** replace litter boxes more than a year old with new boxes. Even though it is cleaned

regularly, plastic retains odors that cats can smell. Preliminary studies indicate that cats prefer large boxes. Ideally, there should be a box per cat plus one extra. Boxes should be scooped at *least* once daily. If you must change litter type, do so gradually, over several weeks. Consider a litter such as Cat Attract<sup>®</sup> that has a scent that cats find pleasing.

**Decrease stress:** Cats spray when they feel their territory is threatened. If outside cats are triggering urination, you may use sprinklers or close blinds, to prevent your cat from visual contact with outdoor cats. Feliway<sup>®</sup> spray a synthetic feline pheromone that can be used to decrease stress. It is available as a spray or plug-in diffuser. Spraying Feliway<sup>®</sup> in areas where territorial marking has occurred can decrease a cat's need to mark.

Minimize territorial disputes between cats in the house by separating cats and reintroducing them slowly using food treats to encourage peaceful behavior.

Consider medication for cats who are anxious or withdrawn. Medication will sometimes be short-term and sometimes cats will need to stay on medications for long term. It is necessary to follow these cats closely with veterinary visits and blood work.