

### HOUSE SOILING CATS- HOW TO STOP THEM

If your cat is urinating or defecating anywhere other than his litter box, you probably find yourself at your wits' end. Though house soiling can seem like a deal breaker, it doesn't have to be. There are ways to remedy the situation so the cat can stay and the behavior goes.

#### *Save your cat's life !*

According to the National Council on Pet Population, 72 percent of cats surrendered to animal shelters in the U.S. are euthanized, and research journals in the fields of animal behavior and companionship cite house soiling as the primary reason they are relinquished in the first place.



One factor that may be underlying this is that 66 percent of owners think that cats act out of spite. But, nothing could be further from the truth. Often it's because of the cat's physical, social, or medical needs are not being met. Your cat needs to see the veterinarian

The first step in resolving a house soiling problem is to schedule an appointment with the veterinarian as soon as you notice a problem.

Often cats are diagnosed with medical problems. For example, an owner may think the cat is not using the box because of a new cat in the house, but a medical workup will reveal bladder stones or intestinal parasites.

Some cats may even develop life-threatening urinary obstructions because their owners misinterpreted their behavior as acting out. This is why it is essential to get a diagnosis and treatment plan in place as soon as possible.

If a medical diagnosis cannot be confirmed, additional assistance from a board-certified veterinary behaviorist may be recommended.

Marking: Sexual or reactionary?

First, it is important to note the difference between urinating and marking or spraying. When marking or spraying, cats tend to stand upright and eliminate a small amount on vertical surfaces. When urinating, cats usually squat and eliminate larger amounts on horizontal surfaces.

Litter box aversion can be an environmental issue that causes your cat to urinate or defecate elsewhere. Here are ways to keep your cat returning to his box:

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- Keep the litter box away from noisy appliances and where children play
- Clean out the litter box every day
- Wash the litter box every one to four weeks
- Place one litter box at each level of a multilevel home
- Consider having two litter boxes in two separate locations for a single cat
- Consider having at least one more litter box than the total number of cats in separate stations
- Avoid placing food and water close to the litter box
- Try placing the litter box at the location of the house soiling, and once the cat begins to use it, gradually move the box to a preferred location
- Make sure the litter box is at least 1.5 times the length of the cat from nose to tail
- Avoid aromatic litter, litter deodorizers, and liners
- The litter should consist of a fine, sand-like, unscented, clumping material
- The depth of the litter should be at least 1.25 inches

The 2014 American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) and International Society of Feline Medicine (ISFM) Guidelines for Diagnosing and Solving House-Soiling Behavior in Cats explain that urine spraying is either a sexual or a reactionary behavior.

### **Sexual Marking**

Is your cat spayed or neutered? According to the AAFP and ISFM guidelines, intact male and female cats both exhibit sexual marking to advertise their presence and availability.

Spaying or neutering an intact cat will dramatically reduce sexually-related marking.

### **Reactionary Marking**

If your cat is spayed or neutered, reactionary marking should be considered.

Introduction of another pet, person, new furniture, or other objects into your home can change the collective odor that the cat is used to, and can stress him enough to induce urine marking behavior.

Suitcases, backpacks, and shoes pick up new scents outside the household, so it is a good idea to keep these out of your cat's reach. Items that change in temperature, such as stoves, toasters, and other electronic equipment, are also frequent marking targets.

The AAFP and ISFM guidelines state that marking behavior that starts at windows and doors usually suggests the perceived threat is coming from outside the home. Try blocking the cat's view of windows and doors if he seems triggered by another animal outside. Make sure your cat's food, water, and resting area are located away from windows and glass doors as well.

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Initial marking in stairways, hallways, and doorways, as well as in the centers of rooms, usually indicates stressors originating from within the household.

A cat may also respond to a new animal or person in the house by marking his territory. They will use the urine marking posture, with or without urinating to do this.

## **Looks Like Marking**

Spraying, however, can occur for other reasons. It is possible for a cat to look like he is in the spraying or marking position, when he is actually unable to urinate properly due to a medical issue. A cat may have bladder stones, stress, or another underlying cause of spraying, so it is very important to have the cat examined and diagnostic tests performed to identify medical problems as soon as possible.

## **Stay Positive**

It is important to note that physically or verbally punishing the cat during or after a house-soiling incident only creates stress, which then increases the motivation to soil, often in less obvious areas.

Instead, behavior modification efforts should focus on positive reinforcement of desired behaviors. Rewards may include affection, positive attention, treats, or whatever your cat likes.

## **Clean Frequently**

Cats will frequently soil the same areas repeatedly. Urine odor changes with time, and frequent marking keeps the odor consistent. Therefore, it is important to clean urine-marked areas regularly.

The AAFP and ISFM guidelines suggest scrubbing the affected area with a 10 percent solution of biological washing powder (enzyme-based laundry detergent), allowing the area to dry, and then spraying the area with isopropyl alcohol.

Chlorine-based products will remove odors from concrete and vinyl floors, but be sure to avoid using ammonia-based cleaners, which smell like urine to a cat.

## **Try Pheromones**

Pheromone therapy studies referenced in the AAFP and ISFM guidelines indicate that environmental use of synthetic pheromones can result in up to 90 percent cessation or reduction in urine spraying behavior. This effect can last even after discontinuing use of the pheromone product.

Adding a pheromone diffuser near the litter box may make the location more appealing.

For more information and tips, visit [www.catvets.com](http://www.catvets.com).