

The Litter Box Blues

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The #1 reason cats are turned in to the humane society is for urinating outside of the box. The good news is that in almost every case we can find the problem and come up with a solution to the ***litter box blues***...

There are 2 reasons for cats to not use the litter box—medical issues or behavioral issues. A routine exam and testing such as a urine sample and in some cases a blood sample will determine whether there is a medical problem. Medical problems leading to urine accidents include: urinary tract infections, bladder inflammation, diabetes, hyperthyroidism, and kidney disease. Usually, once the underlying problem is treated, the litter box problem goes away.



What happens in the Litter Box stays in the Litter Box!

Behavioral issues are a bit more difficult to treat. Once testing has ruled out medical issues, we turn to a behavioral reason for avoiding the litter box. There are a multitude of reasons for a cat to urinate on a clean pile of laundry instead of the box. He ISN'T doing it out of spite! Here are some things you can do:

- ✓ **Clean the box!** Many problems arise simply because the cat is trying to find a clean place to urinate. Face it, nobody wants to use a used bathroom. As cats age, they become more particular about this. In general, scoop the box daily.
- ✓ **Make sure there are enough boxes.** The general rule is a box per cat plus one extra. So, if you have 4 cats, you need 5 boxes.
- ✓ **Take the hoods off.** The reason the hood is there in the first place is because you don't want to smell it. The smell of ammonia is simply overpowering inside that hood. Who wants to go in there? Also, some cats become timid in the box because they can't see if another cat is close by.
- ✓ **Make sure the boxes are in good locations.** Good for you may not be good for your cat. You prefer the box in the back corner of the cold, dark basement next to the laundry machine. To your older arthritic cat, that's quite a trek into dangerous territory. It may just be easier to go on the carpet in the living room. Make sure the boxes are in a relatively quiet but accessible part of the house that your cat likes to hang out in.
- ✓ **Check for litter preferences.** Most cats prefer unscented, scoopable litter. But not every cat reads the rule book! Put several boxes side by side with a different litter type in each box to see if your cat prefers one over the other.
- ✓ **Clean up the accidents properly.** The best way to do this is to get an enzymatic cleaner. This breaks down the urine into smaller molecules so your cat won't smell its alternative bathroom. Most cleaners cover up the urine odor (and not too well either!) but the enzymatic cleaner actually breaks it up. One name brand is Nature's Miracle.
- ✓ **Use Feliway spray** and/or room diffusers. This is a synthetic facial pheromone that tricks the cat into feeling peaceful (and less anxious).

4 Out of 5 Cats Agree

Big Boxes and Lots of Them! Take hoods off.

Scoopable, Unscented Litter. We hate citrus and floral scents.

About 2 inches of Litter.

Fresh Step or Arm & Hammer Super Scoop are good.

- ✓ **Decrease stress.** Last, but certainly not least! Make sure that there aren't any outdoor cats hanging around. If there are, close the blinds and use deterrents as needed. Keep loud dogs and children away from the cat's favorite areas. If indoor cats are fighting with each other, this needs to be addressed. Check out OSU's "Indoor Cat Initiative" on-line for great ideas.

Sometimes, even doing **all** of these things does not resolve the problem. Be in close contact with us if things are not going well. Sometimes, medications to reduce anxiety are needed.

If we've told you your cat has Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease, READ ON!

Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease

Otherwise known as FLUTD. This is the term used to describe the following group of clinical signs:

- ✓ Bloody urine
- ✓ Straining to urinate
- ✓ Urinating outside of the box
- ✓ Urinary blockage (male cats)
- ✓ Small, frequent urinations
- ✓ Licking the urinary opening

What Causes FLUTD?

- ✓ About 50% of the time, a cause cannot be determined, even after extensive testing.
- ✓ About 20% of affected cats will have bladder stones.
- ✓ About 20% of the time, male cats will have a urethral obstruction, causing an inability to urinate. This is an emergency situation.
- ✓ About 10-15% will have a urinary tract infection.
- ✓ About 1% will have urinary tract cancer, trauma, or multiple causes.
- ✓ Older cats have a higher incidence of infections and cancer. Older cats can have concurrent kidney or other metabolic diseases.

If you have a male cat who is straining to urinate, he should be examined immediately!

What is Done to Diagnose FLUTD?

We can suspect FLUTD based on the cat's history and physical examination. Sometimes bladder stones or a urinary blockage are obvious from palpating the bladder. Young cats may just require a urine analysis, while more extensive testing such as bloodwork or radiographs may be required in an older pet.

How is FLUTD Treated?

This depends on which signs are present and whether an underlying cause is found. For instance, if bladder stones are found, they are removed via a special diet or surgery. Infection is treated with antibiotics. Urinary blockage is an emergency which is treated immediately in the hospital. If no underlying cause is found, we generally recommend one or more of the following:

- ✓ Nothing. Uncomplicated cases of FLUTD will generally resolve on their own over time. However, it does tend to recur.
- ✓ Canned food, sometimes a prescription canned diet. This has been proven to reduce the incidence of FLUTD, presumably by reducing the concentration of the cat's urine and thereby reducing any irritating substances within the bladder.
- ✓ Water fountains or leaving faucets dripping. This tempts the cat to drink more, which also dilutes the urine similar to canned food. A good brand is the DrinkWell Fountain.
- ✓ Anti-inflammatory medications. This may reduce pain and swelling in the bladder.
- ✓ Reduce stress! This condition has recently been linked to hormones produced during stress. Refer on-line to OSU's "Indoor Cat Initiative" for great recommendations.

- ✓ Urethral Relaxants. We tend to do this in male cats if we are concerned that the cat may progress from a simple case of FLUTD to a urinary obstruction.
- ✓ Behavioral medications. FLUTD has been linked to stress. Attempt to reduce any sources of stress in the household. Feliway may help (see reverse for more information).

What Do I Do if My Male Cat is Straining To Urinate But Nothing is Produced?

He should always be examined immediately to ensure that he does not have a urinary obstruction. This is a life-threatening emergency. This is NOT something that can wait for more than a few hours. If we are closed, go to the Emergency Center. Other signs of possible obstruction are lethargy and vomiting.