

Behavior FAQ: House Soiling and Urine-Marking

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If your dog is soiling inside the house, first take him to your veterinarian for a checkup.

He may have a medical problem, even if he doesn't act sick. Many different kinds of medical conditions, from urinary tract infections to diabetes to parasitic infections, can cause a change in your dog's elimination habits. Your veterinarian may want to run tests on urine, blood or stool samples.

Dogs soil or relieve themselves in the house for many different reasons. Your dog may never have been fully housetrained, or she may be having a breakdown in her housetraining for a variety of reasons. She may be afraid to go outside or not want to because of uncomfortable weather (too hot, too cold, too wet).

Your dog may be afraid of something—such as a noise, like thunder or fireworks, or of being left alone. Fear loosens the bladder and bowels, causing your dog to soil.

If your dog has been soiling for quite some time, or has never been fully housetrained, he may have developed preferences for indoor surfaces and locations, such as the carpet in the dining room, rather than outdoor areas, such as the grass in the corner of your yard.

Your dog may be urine marking. Because dogs urine mark to announce their presence, marking often increases when something changes and the dog believes she needs to reassert her presence. Urine marking in multidog families often occurs when the dogs don't get along well or frequently compete against one another for important resources.

When dogs urine mark, they will typically leave small amounts of urine in favorite places rather than larger puddles. Urine-marking problems are much more common in intact (not neutered) males, compared with neutered males and females. Just because your dog is lifting his leg or urinating in the house doesn't automatically mean he's urine marking though—he may just be relieving himself.

Can you connect the marking to some event your dog saw as a social challenge or change in her social environment? Do you have houseguests? Have you acquired a new pet? Do you have new furniture or carpets? Is the soiled object something that can carry outside odors, such as shoes, a briefcase or a coat?

Dogs may also urine mark when they are anxious. Depositing their own familiar scent in their surroundings is thought to have a calming effect on dogs. If your male dog isn't neutered, that's your first step in decreasing urine-marking behavior.

No matter the reason, never punish or discipline your dog by showing him his "mess" and yelling at or hitting him. Your dog cannot connect the results of his behavior with your later attempts to punish him. Punishment after the fact doesn't work and will damage your relationship with your dog. Your dog is not soiling to make you mad, to be rebellious or to leave

you a message. Puppy “accidents” are nothing more than a breakdown in supervision or the result of not providing the puppy with enough potty breaks.

If your dog is soiling only when she’s left alone, the problem could be separation anxiety. Remember though, soiling only when the dog is home alone can happen for reasons other than separation anxiety. The most common are other kinds of fear-related problems, insufficient number of potty breaks and your dog’s knowing she’ll be scolded when you are home, but never scolded when you aren’t. That’s another reason why showing your dog her “mess” after the fact just doesn’t work.

FIND A BEHAVIOR CONSULTANT TO HELP

Many problems are easily corrected through modification training, particularly if problems are addressed early. Find an animal behavior consultant in your area through one of the following Web sites: [American College of Veterinary Behaviorists](#), [International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants](#) or [Animal Behavior Society](#). Learn more by reading “Guidelines for Choosing a Trainer or Behavior Consultant.”