

## **Behavior FAQ: Litter Box and Urine Marking/Spraying**

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If your cat is soiling the house, it could be caused by one of several problems. **Your first step should be to consult with your veterinarian to treat or rule out any medical condition, such as a urinary tract infection.** It is also possible that the cat doesn't like using his litter box or that he is spraying. It's rare for a cat to stop using the litter box altogether. Litter box problems are generally resolvable.

Cats are born with a natural predisposition to eliminate in soft, sandy material. However, some develop preferences for eliminating in a variety of materials, including rocks, or even on bare concrete! They don't like litter that is too dirty or too dusty or that is strongly scented with artificial scents. Owners can often identify their cats' preferences and work to meet them.

Cats may develop litter box aversions because they associate bad things with the box, such as being ambushed there by another cat. Cats often dislike boxes placed near noisy appliances, such as washers, dryers or furnaces, or boxes placed in damp or cold locations. Put the litter box in a quiet location where the cat won't be disturbed and that is easily accessible. If you have a multistory residence or a large residence, you may need to place litter boxes on more than one level or at different places in the house.

If you have more than one cat in your home, be sure that you have at least one litter box per cat so that the cats have opportunities to find relatively clean boxes at any time. Clean all litter boxes regularly—anywhere from once a day to several times a week depending on how finicky your cat is about cleanliness.

Litter box problems can be a symptom of other behavior problems, such as your cats not getting along or fear-related problems. Spraying is a marking behavior in which a cat backs up to a wall, furniture or other vertical surface, raises her tail and deposits a small amount of urine. Both males and females can spray. If your male cat isn't neutered, it is unlikely you will be able to control his spraying behavior. Have him neutered now—there are no behavioral reasons not to.

Cats urine mark in response to anything they feel is a threat to their territory, including visitors, odors or other cats. Cats may also spray when they are anxious or fearful. Depositing their own familiar odor seems to have a calming effect on cats.

Urine-marking problems may require both behavior modification and short-term medication prescribed by your veterinarian. Rest assured that your cat is not doing this because she is mad at you, is trying to tell you something or is trying to get back at you. Do not punish your cat, and especially do not show her the "mess" and then put her in the box. This will not solve the problem. Instead, it will significantly damage your relationship with your cat and can cause her to dislike the litter box even more. Some problems require assistance from a certified behaviorist to resolve.

**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.”