

Cats That Eliminate Outside the Litter Box

Reasons

1. Medical- this should be investigated first.
 - a. Bladder problems, diarrhea and constipation can lead to an increased urge to eliminate or an association between the litter box and the pain of elimination seen with these conditions.
 - b. See handout on FIC
 - c. Arthritis and/or weakness can make it difficult to use stairs to get to the litter box or to climb into the litter box.
2. Primary Preference or Aversion
 - a. Type of Litter
 - i. Signs
 1. They eliminate by, but not in the litter box.
 2. They stay on the side or edge of the litter box and eliminate inside, but scratch outside
 - ii. The depth of the litter can be important
 - iii. Most cats prefer soft, sandy, unscented clumping litter (i.e. Fresh Step)
 - iv. Owners can test different litters side by side in similar litter boxes to determine preference.
 - b. Type of Litter Box
 - i. Signs
 1. They eliminate by, but not in the litter box
 - ii. Size of the litter box
 1. Some cats prefer a litter box as large as an underbed storage container
 - iii. Covered vs. Uncovered
 1. Some shy cats may prefer the privacy of a covered litter box
 2. Many cats have an aversion to the smell that gets trapped by a covered litter box.
 - iv. Scoop waste at least once daily
 - v. Fully dump and clean the litter box every 1-2 weeks with soap and water. Don't use cleaning products such as bleach that will increase the odor in the litter box.
 - vi. Owners can test different boxes side by side with the same litter in all to determine their cat's preference.
 - c. Location of Box
 - i. Some questions to answer

1. Is your cat shy? Do you ever see him/her eliminate in front of others?
You may need to place the litter box in a secluded spot.
 2. Does your cat feel vulnerable or trapped while using the litter box?
Place the litter box in a wide open spot.
 3. Are there aggressive acts that occur near the box?
 4. Is the litter box in a noisy area, such as by a furnace or washer/dryer?
 5. Is your cat too old to use the stairs to get to the litter box?
 - ii. If you are struggling to understand why your cat prefers to eliminate in an area other than where the litter box is, you can move the litter box to the preferred elimination area. If there is more than one area, you can move food and water dishes and toys to the other areas. You can then slowly move the litter box towards a more acceptable area if needed.
 - iii. The ideal area for a litter box is commonly a quiet, convenient spot on the periphery of the family's hub of activity, with a good escape route.
3. Secondary Preference
- a. For example, something causes your cat to urinate on a rug instead of in their litter box, and over time a preference for using the rug develops.
 - b. Treatment includes identifying this problem early, isolating your cat from the rugs (or whatever they are using), and reconditioning your cat to use a litter box.
4. Stress and Anxiety
- a. Reasons
 - i. People
 1. Someone who is important to your cat leaves the household.
 2. A new baby arrives.
 3. Visitors are staying at the house.
 - ii. Environment
 1. You recently moved.
 2. You are remodeling your house.
 3. You get new furniture.
 - iii. Animals
 1. A new pet, especially another cat, is introduced into the household
 2. Your cat sees or smells another outdoor cat.
 3. A weaker cat is being blocked by a stronger cat from using the litter box.
 4. One cat is trapped in the litter box area by another cat.
 5. Aggressive acts are taking place near the litter box.
 6. Commonly it is the threatened cat that has the elimination disorder.
 - b. Things you can try
 - i. Remedy any outdoor cat situation.
 - ii. Give it time for cats to adjust to the new animal.
 - iii. If two cats refuse to coexist peacefully, they may need to be physically kept apart, each with their own food, water and litter box.
 - iv. Antianxiety medications can be tried

- v. See “Enhance Your Indoor Cat’s Environment”
- vi. See “Introducing A New Cat”

5. Marking and Spraying

- a. Marking is when the cat deposits small amounts of urine or feces around an area. The amounts are too small to be consistent with an actual elimination.
- b. Spraying usually occurs on vertical surfaces and a characteristic tail wiggle is involved.
- c. Reasons
 - i. It is a way for cats to communicate and interact
 - ii. It is a way for a cat to mark its territory.
 - iii. It is a way for one cat to threaten another cat.
 - iv. It is a way for a weaker cat to respond to a threat, instead of fighting.
 - v. It is a way to show sexual availability.
 - vi. It can be due to the presence of an outdoor cat near the house.
- d. Other facts
 - i. Cats have a keen sense of smell. It is twenty times that of humans.
 - ii. As you increase the number of cats in your house, you increase the likelihood of these behaviors.
- e. Treatment starts with trying to diagnose what is causing the behavior.
 - i. Again, remedy any outdoor cat situation.
 - ii. Antianxiety medications can help in some cases.
 - iii. Spaying and neutering should be done.
 - iv. See “Enhancing Your Indoor Cat’s Environment”

Overall treatments that can help in many cases

- Have one litter box per cat, plus one extra.
- Decrease litter box odors.
- Neutralize odors arising from eliminating outside the litter box.
It is best to use an enzyme-based spot and stain remover (Nature’s Miracle).
- Enhance the environment.