

Litterbox Problems Can Be Prevented

'An ounce of prevention.. - "

- #1 Have your cat spayed or neutered at six months of age. Sexually mature, intact cats frequently use urine and fecal marking to indicate their territory. Neutering will correct 90% of elimination problems.
- #2 The rule of thumb for the number of litter boxes is: one per cat in the household, plus one. Extra litterboxes are necessary because some cats like to defecate in one and urinate in another. Others will not use a box that has already been soiled or used by another cat.
- #3 Clean the litterboxes DAILY. The single most common reason for a cat's refusal to use a litterbox is because the box is dirty. Non-clumping litter should be scooped daily and the litterbox emptied and washed every other day. Clumping litter should also be scooped daily and the litterboxes washed when soiled.
- #4 Choose a litter that appeals to the cat. Most cats prefer the texture of the sand-like scooping litters. Be sure to choose a brand that clumps into a firm ball, making scooping easier and cleaner. (Everclean HD is excellent).* As a health precaution for young kittens that might be prone to ingest the litter, use a non-clumping litter until the kitten is four months old.
- #5 NEVER use scented litter. Perfumed, chemical scents repel cats. When you wash the litterbox, use a mild dishwashing liquid. Do not use harsh chemicals that will leave an odor.
- #6 Do not use litterbox liners - they can be irritating to some cats. Also covered, or hooded litterboxes may be offensive to some cats. Be sure the litterbox is not too small for your cat. The minimum size for a litterbox is 22" x 16."
- #7 Place litterboxes in quiet, private places that are easily accessible to the cat and where it will not be disturbed by children or ambushed by other pets. Noisy areas near washing machines, furnaces, or under stairs may frighten the cat away from the box. A house with several stories should have a litterbox on each floor. NEVER place litterboxes near food and water dishes.
- #8 While kittens have an innate predisposition to use loose material as their litter, they may also choose other locations. You should limit their territory until they learn that the litterbox is the only acceptable place for elimination. Praise and rewards will speed up the learning process. Like small children, they should not be expected to travel very far to find their toilet areas.
- #9 When introducing a new cat into the home, confine the cat to one room with its litterbox, bed, food and water, until the cat has used the litterbox several times and shows an interest in exploring the rest of the house.
- #10 Help your cat feel comfortable in his own home and territory. Play games with him, give him a massage, talk to him frequently. Give him positive and

affectionate attention. A confident, secure, contented and relaxed cat does not need to relieve anxiety and stress by such extreme measures as urine or fecal marking.

A few cats simply seem to have peculiar litterbox preferences. Some like smooth or soft surfaces and will often use the bathtub or the floor next to the litterbox. DECLAWED CATS OFTEN HAVE A REPUTATION FOR DOING THIS MORE OFTEN THAN OTHERS. Try offering the cat an empty litterbox or one lined only with newspaper.

What To Do If Your Cat is Not Consistently Using the Litterbox *a pound of cure"*

- #1 Have your cat examined by a veterinarian for a physical problem. Be sure to mention kitty's urination and defecation habits. If a cat's elimination is painful, it may associate the litterbox with pain and choose to eliminate elsewhere. When the cat is healthy again, a careful reintroduction to the box will be necessary.
- #2 Carefully check the 10 steps for preventing litterbox problems. Are you following all of them? Perhaps the solution is as easy as adding more litterboxes, cleaning more frequently, or changing the brand of litter. Try to accommodate kitty's preferences for location and litter material whenever possible.
- #3 Never punish the cat for eliminating outside of its litterbox. Housesoiling occurs when the litterbox, its contents, or its location is offensive to the cat or when the cat is stressed by the environment. Punishment only increases the cat's stress. HOUSESOILING IS NEVER DONE TO SPITE THE OWNER.
- #4 If aversion to the litterbox can be ruled out, consider that the problem could be anxiety-related. Has there been a change in the household? Any intrusion on the cat's territory, whether human, animal, or even a new piece of furniture, can cause a cat to feel threatened, insecure, and stressed. This results in his need to remind himself and the world of his territory. Territorial marking is usually accomplished by spraying urine on vertical surfaces, or less frequently, by squatting and urinating or defecating on horizontal surfaces. The more cats in the household, the more likely it is that one or more of them will spray.
- #5 Try to relieve or eliminate the source of the cat's anxiety. (For example, pull the drapes so that kitty cannot view the antics of the tom cat next door.) If the environmental cause that triggers the territorial behavior cannot be identified or eliminated, consult with an experienced feline behavior counselor.
- #6 Whatever the cause for the inappropriate elimination, a brief confinement period may be necessary in order to clean the soiled areas, place deterrents in

these spots, and to purchase more litterboxes or new litter. The confinement room should be a comfortable room and should contain two litterboxes, fresh food and water, and a bed and toys. (Remember not to place the litterboxes near the food and water.) Visit kitty regularly, but don't let him out until the home environment has been cleaned and the litterbox situation has been improved. (Please note that extended periods of confinement may be detrimental to the retraining process.) When kitty is let out, it is important to PRAISE APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR.

#7 In order to thoroughly clean the urine-soaked areas, a black light may be used to identify the problem spots and a strong enzymatic cleaner should be used to saturate and neutralize them. The Equalizer (available through veterinary clinics) and Zap-A-Spot have proven to be highly effective. To repel kitty from previously soiled areas, cover them with a vinyl carpet runner (upside down!), a solid air freshener (preferably a citrus scent), or bowls of dry cat food.

Solving housesoiling problems is possible - with patience, persistence, and a systematic plan for retraining. If you would like help determining the cause or treatment for an inappropriate elimination problem, call Cats International at (262) 375-8852, or visit their website at www.catsinternational.org.