

House Soiling in Cats

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Cats that are house-soiling with urine may be differentiated from those that are urine marking by the amount of urine that is released. When marking, a cat eliminates small amounts of urine at a time, usually on vertical surfaces, whereas a house-soiling cat tends to empty his bladder, resulting in a large puddle or wet spot. The exception to the above statement is that cats sometimes mark with full urination and/or defecation on human's concentrated pheromones (body odour) ie. beds, bath mats, dirty clothes, etc. In these cases, the cat has a specific conflict with the person on whose pheromones he urinates or defecates and is treated for marking.

Cats may stop using their litter box for a variety of reasons. They may develop an aversion to the litter or the pan, they may be under some environmental stress, or they may have some disease. Environmental stresses, while not common causes of house soiling, can be difficult to deal with. Moving, a new animal or person, or separation anxiety may cause house-soiling. If the cat is urinating on a person's clothing or belongings, the cat often feels frustration related to that person. For example, the cat may be very dependant on that person, and the person's schedule changes so they are spending less time with the cat. Urinating on personal items usually starts several days to one week after the event. As stresses are cumulative, it may be that some combination of the above causes are responsible for your cat's loss of house training.

Disease may also cause the cat to lose house training. Anything which causes the cat to drink excessively will also increase the number of times it has to urinate, which can lead to "mistakes" around the house. Gastrointestinal diseases and nervous system disturbances may also cause the problem. The most common disease related cause of loss of house training is urinary tract infection or subclinical cystitis. For this reason, your first step when the cat starts to house soil should be to have it examined by your veterinarian.

TREATING HOUSE-SOILING

1. TAKE THE CAT TO YOUR VETERINARIAN FOR A COMPLETE PHYSICAL EXAM AND URINALYSIS. Make certain that your cat does not have a disease which is causing him to soil in the house.
2. ADDRESS POSSIBLE PROBLEMS WITH THE LITTER BOX.
 - too clean (cats hate the smell of soap. Rinse the box with hot water, but do not wash it).
 - too dirty (scoop the litter daily, and change it twice a week).
 - change the type of litter. Cats tend to avoid deodorant litter or litter containing Chlorophyll. You might try mixing sand 50:50 with the litter. Cats have desert ancestors and sand seems to be a preferred substrate for elimination.
 - not enough litter in the pan (cats generally like about 2" of litter).
 - location of the litter pan (put it where the cat is soiling, then gradually move it to a more desirable location).
 - change the type of pan to one with high sides, one with a cover, etc.
 - build a frame around the pan so that the cat can jump in easily.
 - never punish the cat when it is in or near the litter pan (this will cause the cat to associate the pan with unpleasant experiences, and avoid it).
2. Clean the environment. Clean the areas where the cat has urinated or defecated. The smell of

previous messes will stimulate the cat to eliminate in that location again. Cats have a very sensitive sense of smell, so it is impossible to eliminate the odour totally. Therefore, you must mask it.

CARPET-- After cleaning each soiled area with spot remover, rub a 1/4 teaspoon of mothball crystals deep into the pile of the carpet. You should not be able to smell the mothballs yourself, but the cat will be able to and will stay away from those areas. Replace the mothball crystals every 5-7 days for one month.

TILE -- Wash the area with a strong soap like Pine Sol. Mix up a solution of 1 part Dettol and 4 parts water. Wash the area with Dettol and water every 4 days for a month.

SHOWER / TUB -- Leave 2" of water in the bottom of the tub.

FLOWER POTS -- Use pure blood meal, mothballs or upside-down mousetraps to keep the cat away.

3. **REMOVE OR ALTER ENVIRONMENTAL STRESSES WHICH MAY CAUSE ANXIETY.**
If the cat is urinating on clothes or bedding, keep the cat out of the bedroom. You might also want to try putting a mousetrap on the bed to scare the cat away when it jumps up. By keeping the cat out of the room for a few weeks, it may stop the soiling. If other changes have been made in the environment, the ideal solution is to change things back to the way they were before the cat started soiling. We realize that in many cases this is not possible. If so, try spending more time with the cat. We may also want to have your veterinarian prescribe some medication to reduce any anxiety your cat may be feeling. Medication, however, will not solve the problem, and may prolong the treatment by reducing your cat's ability to learn. To eliminate the problem, you must determine what is bothering the cat, and deal with the cause. The temporary use of anti-anxiety drugs is generally necessary in order to deal with stress induced urination and defecation.
4. **RETRAIN THE CAT TO THE LITTER BOX.** Confine the cat to a small room (the bathroom is ideal) for 1-2 weeks. Put the cat's litter box, food, water and toys, along with his bed in with him. Spend time with him every day, but take him out of the room only if you are holding him. This will mean that the cat has no opportunity to go in any place other than his litter box, located in the confined area. Once he is consistently using the box, you can gradually allow access to the rest of the house. When you start training, place a small amount of soiled material in the box each time you change the litter. The odour will attract the cat to use the litter. When you move the pan out of the bathroom, make sure that it is in a quiet, accessible location. You may wish to put a litter pan on each floor of your house.

The above techniques have worked well in the past, but they require a commitment from you if they are to be effective. We are here to help you in whatever way we can, so please call if you have any problems or questions. If the above techniques do not work, we may want to have your veterinarian prescribe some medication to reduce any anxiety your cat may be feeling. Working together, I am sure that we will be able to train your cat to use his litter box consistently.

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