

# Thinking Outside the Box Isn't Always Welcome

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## Is the cat marking/spraying or voiding/housesoiling

### Is the cat backing up against walls, furniture to spray?

- Is the tail is quivering, and the cat's rump wiggling when spraying?
- Is urine dripping vertically down furniture or walls?
- Is the cat vocalizing while spraying? (Note, cats may also, though rarely, mark on a flat surface)

If replies are yes, the cat is likely marking or spraying (opposed to voiding/housesoiling):

Marking behavior is often much like cats spray painting to tag their territories, and perhaps to express anxiety (rarely, cats also mark with stool).

- Is the cat neutered?
- Is the cat seeing/smelling outdoor cats (even rarely other animals) which are causing a territorial response?
- In multi-cat homes, is there a new feline addition? Are various cats getting along?
- Is there a new piece of furniture which cat is spraying on?
- Is cat spraying against the wall in an apartment or condominium where another cat is living on the other side of that wall?

## Actions to be taken

- Veterinary exam to rule out contributing physical explanation.
- Neuter the cat.
- Pull down shades, close blinds to prevent seeing outdoor cats.
- Consider a motion detector sprinkler, or another humane deterrent to dissuade outdoor cats.
- When unsupervised, confine spraying cat in a part of the house where outdoor cats or cats on other side of a neighbor's wall can't be seen, heard, smelled.
- If new furniture is being sprayed against, cover the furniture to protect it.
- Add a litter box near where cat is spraying.
- Consider spraying synthetic pheromone product, such as Feliway (as directed) where cat has sprayed.
- If it's a 'cat vs. cat' situation, seek professional help to advise behavior modification to broker peace.
- If recommendations aren't successful seek professional help and perhaps psychopharmaceutical may be indicated.

## Where is the cat voiding urine/housesoiling?

### What if the cat is voiding (housesoiling) on furniture (such as in a sink) on a sofa or a bed.

Veterinary exam to rule out idiopathic cystitis, urinary bladder stones, urinary tract infection (FLUTD) or any other physical cause.

- Cats who require a "litter box perch" are sometimes feeling "insecure," threatened and/or generally anxious about other cats (or other pets, even children) in proximity to existing litter boxes.
- Even if it seems cats are getting along, signaling in cats is subtle. A cat lying in a hallway leading to a box, for example, may be enough to dissuade a second cat from heading in that direction. Cats may be very clear about daily disdain for one another, or offer subtle yet intimidating cues only in specific contexts.
- Change may cause anxiety; the owners' work schedule, home construction, a new partner or pet moving in, etc. The owner's bed is soft and cushy, offers a secure view and because it's comforting and smells so reassuring.

## What you can do

- Ease anxiety. If a houseguest or new partner has moved in, have that person interact positively with the cat, taking over responsibility for feeding and offering treats; and most important, play with an interactive cat toy. Interactive play is always a great stress-buster. If the cat is unwilling to interact, best to ignore the cat.
- When cats may not be getting along – offer an abundance of resources, most importantly litter boxes (more is better), also toys and scratching posts.
- Make those areas where the cat is urinating unattractive. Affix double stick tape on plastic placemats (cat don't like to feel sticky on their paws), or purchase a product called Sticky Paws. A Scatmat (placed on furniture) is flexible PVC which is plugged in, and gives those who jump on it a mild electronic shock, Ssscat! Is a motion detector which alarms and sprays.
- Use a plug-n synthetic pheromone, such as Feliway, or a pheromone collar (such as SentryHC Good Behavior Calming Pheromone Cat Collar).

- Use a baby gate (or another barrier) to keep the dog(s) away from the litter box (you can cut a hole in for the cat to go through, or raise the gate so the cat can easily squeeze under).
- Additional professional advice for behavior modification and potentially physcho-pharmaceuticals may be required.

### **What if the cat is voiding (housesoiling) next to the litter box(s)?**

Veterinary exam to rule out ideopathic cystitis, urinary bladder stones, urinary tract infection (FLUTD), osteoarthritis, diabetes, kidney disease, hyperthyroid, feline cognitive dysfunction or any other physical cause.

Assuming, the cat is physically well, a cat who urinates next to the box may generally communicating the location isn't so much an issue, but instead the cat finds something aversive about the litter box.

- If the owner has switched cat litters recently, return to a previous brand.
- Scoop at least once daily.
- If the litter box is a about a year old or more, replace the box itself.
- If the box is covered, consider removing the hood.
- If the cat is defecating in the box and urinating just outside the box, sometimes adding a nearby second box will solve the problem.
- Obese cats (who may also be arthritic) can have difficulty moving into and out of the box. Either buy an extra-large manufactured litter box, or consider a plastic storage container (the kind you'd keep sweaters and store under a bed). Low sides are best so it's effortless for the cat to walk in and out. Also, a veterinarian can suggest a weight loss program and appropriate pain relief.
- If the litter is suspect, allow the cat to choose via a litter trial giving three or four choices, literally lining up the boxes as a buffet.

### **General litter box advice**

- The rule is one more box than the number of cats in the home (if possible).
- Clumping scoopable, unscented litter is often preferred. Finer grain is best.
- When deciding locations of the boxes, consider relationships of various cats. Signaling in cats may be covert, and cats who seemingly are friendly may sometimes have agonistic associations.
- Location, location, location: Boxes should be away from commotion, where the cat(s) can feel secure, and are afforded privacy. However, being "trapped" in a corner is a problem. Basements may be a source of loud and sudden sounds, which can be frightening. Also, as cats age, navigating stairs may become difficult.
- Place litter boxes in various locations around the house (so they're not all in one room).
- Scoop boxes at least once daily. And change out the litter weekly.
- For cats who develop a substrate preference for carpet, it's not unheard of to place a carpet remnant in the box. If the cat begins to use the box, gradually litter can be added while the remnant cut away at.
- If boxes are covered, consider having at least one uncovered.
- CatAttract Litter Additive (Precious Cat, Inc) is an organic additive which might attract cats to the litter box.

### **Additional general advice**

- As cats are successfully re-directed to a litter box, encourage positive reinforcement with praise and a treat (as you would house training a puppy).
- Cats must never be physically punishing, or their nose "rubbed in an accident;" this will only heighten anxiety in an already anxious cat and can create mistrust.
- The litter box(es) should generally not be in close proximity to food and water.
- Indoor/outdoor cats do require litter boxes.
- Approximately 1 ½ to three-inches of litter is correct.
- In multi cat homes determining the culprit can be a challenge. A veterinarian can prescribe Fluorescein dye, which may be given to one cat; urine that's found outside the litterbox during the next 24 hours can be checked for fluorescence using a Wood's light. If urine does not fluoresce, fluorescein should be administered to each cat until the one responsible is found. (A positive test does not eliminate the possibility that more than one cat engages in urine marking at other times).
- For cats who do use the box, but overshoot the top of the box ("shooting urine"), try a covered box or a box with higher sides. Another option is to affix washable Plexiglas to a nearby wall.
- While relegating the cat to a small room, such as a bathroom, may "re-train" a cat having accidents to the box, and prevent accidents elsewhere in the home – the inappropriate elimination is likely to return unless the underlying issue which caused the problem in the first place is dealt with.

- Enriched environments are particularly important for indoor cats. It's been demonstrated that cats lacking this enrichment are more susceptible to stress which may lead to inappropriate elimination, sometimes specifically linked to idiopathic cystitis.
- An excess of resources, resting places, litter boxes and scratching posts, etc, is always suggested.
- Pharmacological interventions will not help cats with aversions to litter, litter boxes or location; the drugs do potentially do help cats with anxiety issues, including intercat relationship issues with behavior modification.
- Clean accidents with enzymatic cleaners.

## References

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