

Feline Elimination Behaviors

Throughout their lives, many household cats will experience some problem with elimination behaviors. These behaviors may include urinating, defecating or scent marking outside of their litter box. Although the causes for these behaviors vary greatly, most stem from medical issues, litter and litter box aversions, or stress caused by changes to environmental factors. In order to diagnose and correct the behavior it is important to determine the underlying cause behind the new behavior.

There are many different medical conditions that may cause your pet to begin eliminating in unwanted areas. It is important for your veterinarian to perform a complete examination and, perhaps, other tests to determine if there is a medical condition that would precipitate the behavior. Some of the medical conditions that your veterinarian would look for are diseases of the urinary tract, liver, kidneys or endocrine system. Many of these diseases can cause pain when urinating or may cause increased fluid intake and excretion. Other diseases of the colon and digestive tract may also cause defecation problems. When examining your cat for medical causes, your veterinarian will also look for limitations in motor and mobility functions. If your pet is having difficulty with its senses, joints or other muscular issues it may not be able to access its current litter box as easily and, therefore, result in unwanted elimination behaviors.

At times, some cats may experience an aversion to their current litter or litter boxes. These aversions may be due to smell, size or the tactile sensation. If your pet has started to eliminate in unwanted areas, analyze where the behavior occurs, the type of substrate, the time of day, and the frequency with which the animal demonstrates the behavior. Your pet may demonstrate these behaviors if the litter box is located in an undesirable area. Areas that are considered undesirable vary by pet, but are often high traffic areas, areas that are far away from all family members, such as basements, or areas that are inhabited by many pets. Determine the type of substrate your pet prefers to eliminate on, such as hard surfaces or on carpet. Some pet owners notice that their pets only practice the unwanted elimination behaviors at specific times of day, such as when the owners are preparing to leave or when a child returns home from school. Other animals may demonstrate these behaviors when their box is cleaned, due to an aversion to the scent of the cleaners used.

In order to minimize unwanted elimination behaviors it may be necessary to try many different combinations of location, litter and box, until your cat is satisfied with its new litter box. Begin by offering your pet two litter boxes. One box should remain in the current location and the other should present a new option of box, litter or location. Once your pet demonstrates a preference for a new choice, change the first box to that choice and keep offering new options with the second. This process will allow you to find the perfect match for your pet.

Some ideas for determining different animals preferences include: For a cat that location appears to be the problem, work to move the new box to a quiet area of the home. If your pet prefers to eliminate on a specific type of substrate, mimic that feeling in the litter box. For example, for a cat that prefers to eliminate on tile, linoleum, or another hard surface, line the litter box with

newspaper or a fine layer of litter over plastic; for a cat that prefers carpet, line the rim of the box with carpet and place a fluffy litter inside; and for a cat that prefers eliminating in plants, use a sand or very fine litter. For a cat that may be experiencing physical conditions such as muscle pains, experiment with low sided boxes or ramps. Some cats crave privacy and will only eliminate in boxes with hoods, while others feel that they may be ambushed and will not enter a box that is covered. The key to determining your cats preferences is to slowly and patiently analyze your pets behavior and choices. Continue to work with your cat and offer new choices, until you and your pet are satisfied with the perfect combination.

During the process of determining the best elimination scenario, it may be necessary to confine your pet when you are not able to be present and supervise its behaviors. If confinement is necessary, be sure to choose a secure location where the animal has not inappropriately eliminated in the past and provide comfortable bedding, food, water and a litter pan with the preferred substrate. As you find the right combination of elements and your pet begins to eliminate appropriately, the confinement periods should be able to be eliminated.

When analyzing the cause of your pets behavior, be sure to look for factors that may cause stress elimination. Cats are very sensitive to changes in their territory and may stress easily. Strong stress factors such as new pets, a new baby or the loss of a family member may trigger unwanted elimination episodes. Other factors such as new furniture, changes in routine or moving may also cause issues. Finding the perfect combination for your pet, may take time and patience, but your beloved pet will soon be demonstrating model behavior.

