



Issue: Going Outside of the Litter Box (Inappropriate Elimination)

There are two ways to pee outside the litter box: spraying and inappropriate elimination. Spraying is usually done by sexually intact or recently neutered adult males, but it can be done by either sex and at any time, although more rarely. Inappropriate elimination involves squatting, whereas with spraying the cat remains standing up or gets up on two feet.

Medical vs. Behavioral

Medical:

The first thing to do before assuming it's a behavioral problem is to rule out a variety of medical causes from urinary tract infections to diabetes, arthritis and kidney disease by taking your cat to a veterinarian for an exam and possibly doing some testing. If you assume the problem is behavioral when it's actually medical, you may become frustrated that nothing you try works, while the cat's medical condition possibly worsens.

Behavioral:

Before going into the many types and causes of litter box aversions, it may help to ask yourself a series of questions first:

- When did the problem begin?
- Did anything in your home change at this time, particularly with respect to litter box location, type of litter, frequency of litter box cleaning, work schedule, new people in the home or introduction of new pets?

If the answer is "yes" to any of the above except for new people or new pets, try immediately undoing that change and putting things back the way they were. That might be enough to fix the problem. If there is a new person in the home, work on helping the cat and the person become friends. The best way to do this is to have the new person take on the role of feeding the cat for every meal and building as many positive associations with the cat as possible, without trying to force anything. If there is

a new cat in the home, separate them and begin a slow introduction (see “Cat Introduction” flyer).

Solutions

If the behavioral changes above don't help, then it's time to apply some practical psychology. To do this it can be helpful to try “behavioral experiments” in order to find the cause of the problem, and therefore the solution.

- Do you have enough litter boxes? Make sure there is at least one box per cat and if there is just one cat, try offering a second box.
- Make sure the boxes are super clean, scooped twice daily.
- If you recently switched litter, go back to the old litter. Consider using a clumping clay litter so you can easily scoop out the urine.
- Avoid scented litters and litters with naturally strong scents, like pine or cedar.
 - Humans may appreciate the smell but it can be off-putting for the cat whose nose is right next to it.
- Avoid using covered boxes. These retain odors more, and cats don't like that.
- Anywhere the cat has gone outside the box, clean those spots super well with an enzyme-based cleaner like Nature's Miracle that really gets the scent out. Otherwise, cats will go back to pee or poop where they smell it.
- Make sure litter boxes are in quiet locations that are easy to get to and free of lots of noises and foot traffic. In a multi-level home, there should be a litter box on every level.
- Never punish a cat that goes outside the box. This will add to the cat's stress level and will likely make the problem worse.
- Keep food and water away from the box. Cats are clean animals and they don't like to eliminate near where they eat or drink.
- If the cat has a place where they consistently go outside the box, try adding a litter box by that spot (after cleaning it).
- If all else fails, try a type of litter that is known to attract cats, like Dr. Elsey's Cat Attract.
 - Find it here: drelseys.com/products/cat-attract-litter
- If the cat is a fairly young kitten, she may not have properly learned how to use the litter box. Consider re-training. See the handout on this subject.

If you apply a systematic and comprehensive approach to the problem and look at it both medically and behaviorally, in most cases this frustrating problem can be solved!

Resources:

<https://www.cathealth.com/behavior/inappropriate-behavior/2262-inappropriate-urination-in-cats>

https://www.petmd.com/cat/slideshows/training/top-ten-ways-to-stop-peeing-outside-litter-box?view_all=1

<https://www.thesprucepets.com/cat-peeing-everywhere-552307>

For more information:

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants: m.iaabc.org

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists: corecaab.org