

Troubleshooting Litterbox Issues

Why cats eliminate outside the litterbox

If your cat is house-soiling, you're likely pretty frustrated. That's understandable! Whether this is a new issue or has been going on for years, there are things you can do to try and resolve the problem. **Your cat is trying to tell you something is wrong.** It just takes a little detective work to figure it out.



Why cats pee and poop outside the litterbox

Medical reasons

- Your veterinarian is your first call when your cat suddenly starts house soiling.
- Urinary issues such as inflammation and crystals often cause peeing outside the box.
- Constipation often causes pooping outside the box.
- But it's not limited to the urinary and digestive systems. Cats will house-soil due to any kind of pain or discomfort.

Emotional reasons

- Anxiety, fear, hormones, concern over other cats, nervousness with a new baby in the home and many other emotional stressors can lead to house soiling.

Litterbox setup

- Litterboxes can be a huge stress point for cats. They aren't just a place to pee.
- In the wild, there are three life-and-death things associated with where a cat chooses to eliminate:
 - ✓ Next to a fresh water source can lead to contamination, sickness and even death
 - ✓ In their own hunting ground keeps prey away so they can't hunt
 - ✓ Anytime they're eliminating, they're very vulnerable to predators
- Things like box size, cleanliness, litter type, fear of being pounced on, not being able to safely and easily get to the box, loud and scary things happening around the box and so much more can send your cat looking for a location that feels more natural and secure.

If your cat is house-soiling...

Set up an appointment with your veterinarian

- Look for urinary and digestive issues as well as other signs of pain or discomfort.
- Note any other behavioral changes you've seen from your cat – eating and drinking habits, cuddliness, playfulness, how much they're sleeping, etc.

Take a look at your litterbox setup from your cat's perspective

- Are the litterbox type, litter type, location, number of boxes and scooping schedule meeting your cat's instinctual needs?
- Have you thoroughly cleaned all previous urine spots with an enzymatic cleaner (avoiding using any other cleaners alongside the enzymatic that could kill the enzymes)?

☐ Look for emotional triggers

- Were there any big changes or events in your cat's life around the time the soiling started?
- Are there relationship issues with other pets or people in the home?
- Is your cat generally anxious?
- Are there neighborhood cats outside who are upsetting your cat?

When you can't solve the problem alone

Don't worry! You're not stuck living with house soiling and you don't need to think about surrendering your cat or sending them to live outside. There's still more you can do to try and resolve house soiling.

Work with a professional. Find a certified feline training and behavior consultant or veterinary behaviorist in your area or virtually. They can do a deep dive into your cat's soiling issues and give you lots of tactics to work on it. Of course, there are no guarantees. But there's a lot in the house-soiling toolkit that can help your cat feel safe and comfortable using their litterbox again.

For more information:

www.felinebehaviorsolutions.com

Or contact LeeAnna Buis, certified feline training and behavior specialist at leeanna@felinebehaviorsolutions.com

LeeAnna Buis, CFTBS, is a certified feline training and behavior specialist. She strives to dispel misconceptions about cats and why they do what they do. She teaches you to look at things from the cat's perspective. "If you're aware of a cat's natural needs and instincts, and you view situations through that lens, instantly you'll better understand why those unwanted behaviors exist — why they're reacting the way they are. And you'll be much better armed to address the behaviors with kindness and understanding — in a way that meets your cat's needs as well as your own." leeanna@felinebehaviorsolutions.com



Marci Koski, PhD, is a certified feline training and behavior professional who has successfully helped cats and their people resolve behavior problems such as house-soiling, aggression (with other cats and people), fearfulness, destructive behaviors, and many other issues. The mission of Feline Behavior Solutions is to keep cats in homes and out of shelters as the result of treatable behavioral issues. By providing cat guardians with the necessary education and tools to prevent or treat behavior problems, Dr. Marci helps guardians coexist with their cats in happy, healthy relationships throughout their lives. marci@felinebehaviorsolutions.com

