

## Why Has My Cat Stopped Using the Litterbox?

**CatChannel veterinary expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, offers suggestions for curbing errant behavior.**

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**Q:** I have a cat that is 3 years old. She just started urinating on my floor in the past couple days. There have not been any major changes in her lifestyle. What is causing this and what can I do to stop it?

**A:** When a cat urinates out of the litterbox, it is usually one of three things: a medical problem, marking behavior or a toileting problem. You need to bring your cat to your vet to rule out a medical problem. Your vet may want to do a urinalysis, urine culture and X-ray. If a medical problem is ruled out, you're left with marking behavior or a toileting problem. Most cats will mark by spraying the urine on vertical surfaces.

However, if the surface that the cat wants to mark happens to be horizontal, the cat will squat to mark rather than stand up and spray. In this case, you have to look at what is being soiled, i.e. is the item "socially significant"? If the cat is urinating on your bed or your pillow, or on the couch where you spend a lot of time sitting, then maybe this is marking behavior. If the cat is urinating on the floor, chances are that the cat is engaging in inappropriate bathroom behavior. Cats generally do this because they either don't like their litterbox or they like the spot they are using more than their litterbox, or both. You need to make the litterbox more appealing, and the spot they're doing it on less appealing.

First you should make sure there are enough litterboxes. The magic formula, when a behavior problem develops, is  $N + 1$ , meaning that there should be one more litterbox than there are cats in the house. One cat? Two boxes. Three cats? Four boxes. If you add a new box, it should be placed in a quiet, low-traffic area. Do not place it next to the current box. The new box should not have a hood, and you should use scoopable, clumping cat litter. The litterbox should be cleaned daily.

To make the spot she's going on less appealing, first you should clean it very well so that there's no odor of urine at all. An enzymatic cleaner which destroys the odor molecules, such as Nature's Miracle, is ideal for this. Then, to repel the cat from the area, you can put down strips of aluminum foil or plastic wrap. Sticky Paws – large sheets of double-sided sticky tape – is an ideal product for this. Cats hate the feel of the sticky tape when they step on it, and your cat should be repelled from the area. Once she learns that this is no longer a fun area to hang around in, she'll stay away, and you can peel up the tape; she probably won't go back.

If the behavior continues despite all of your efforts, there are some psycho-active drugs that can be given that often cause cats to stop their urinary misbehavior, but we save this option as a last resort. Most cats respond to the addition of a second litterbox. Good luck!