

## Kitty, Please Use the Litterbox!

**Litterbox problems are among the most frustrating for cat owners. Learn how to solve current soiling situations and prevent future ones.**

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We hold cats in awe and appreciation as mysterious, former creatures of the wild who now share our homes. But sometimes the mystery is down-right torturous for us when we try to figure out why they abandon or ignore the litterboxes we provide, and instead leave their smelly waste behind the couch, on the bed or a sprayed-on, amber-colored graffiti on our walls. Mysterious? Yes. Perplexing? Certainly. Aggravating? Absolutely! This is a big problem, because too much of this nose-holding mystery and our unfathomable kitty is at risk of going from an indoor kitty to an outdoor one, or looking for a new home altogether.

House soiling is the most commonly reported behavioral reason for owners to have their cats euthanized or relinquish them to shelters. Other owners turn cats out of their homes to become outdoor-only cats, exposing them to a greater risk of illness, injury or even death. Worse yet, disgruntled owners think that cats eliminate on their possessions because they are spiteful or angry, leading to mistrust and resentment.

On the other side of the coin is a cat that is following its natural inclinations in an unnatural environment and doesn't understand why the usually loving human who shares its space is sometimes so angry. How distressing it must be for them to be punished for not following rules they cannot understand, never knowing when their natural behavior will evoke loving cuddles or cold withdrawal. Is Something Wrong with Your Cat? From the human perspective, feline elimination problems are simply cats doing their business where they shouldn't. But for the cat there can be a myriad of different problems, and in order to solve house-soiling difficulties, you need to approach them from the cat's perspective.

Determining the type of elimination problem can be the confusing part. Does the cat have a health condition, a problem with its litterbox, is it spraying to leave a signal or is it responding to anxiety?

For all animals, urine and feces are the natural end products of digestion and metabolism. But for cats, urine is also an olfactory signaling devise, a communication method.

"To tell if the cat is spraying, the single, easiest factor to look at is if there is any urine being deposited on vertical surfaces," said Laurie Bergman, VMD, coordinator of the Behavior Service of the UC Veterinary Medical Center in San Diego. "With marking, small amounts are being deposited. The frequency may be several times a day."