

## My Longhaired Cat Is Avoiding Litterbox

**CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger discusses litterbox aversion and how to overcome it.**

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**Q:** What to do with a cat who will not use the cat box for pooping, and now has taken to even peeing on the floor as well? She's 4 years old. She poops on the tile floor in the laundry room. She always has had problems with pooping because of her long hair that we end up cutting "dingles" out of regularly. But now the peeing thing is really getting old, even though it's also on the tile and not the carpet. Let me know what we can do about her?

**A:** Before determining that this is a behavior problem, take your cat to the veterinarian and have her checked for any medical issues that could be causing the out-of-the box experiences. Urinary tract infections, kidney disease, diabetes and thyroid are some of the diseases that can cause a cat to urinate outside of the litter box. Parasites, constipation and diarrhea can also cause litterbox aversion.

After your cat has been given a clean bill of health, then we approach the problem as a behavior challenge. Her litterbox aversion is a response to something occurring in her environment. It's important to determine what is causing the behavior and then address those triggers.

It sounds like she initially started not using her cat box because of her long hair. Cats do not like litter and excrement sticking to their fur. I always recommend having longhaired cats trimmed under their tails and the backs of their rear legs. Veterinarians and some groomers should be able to give her a neat back trim on a regular basis.

Excellent litterbox maintenance is mandatory. Boxes need to be large and uncovered. You need one box per cat and one for the house. If she is the only cat, then ideally she should have two boxes available to her, located in different areas of the house so that she has choices. The locations of the boxes are important. They need to be placed in areas where she won't feel trapped. Closets and showers are not good locations for cat boxes. Laundry rooms can be scary places when the appliances cycle. Good locations are places where she has multiple escape routes and has a good view of the whole room and out the door. Also, make sure you scoop the boxes out at least once a day. Avoid scented litters.

I highly recommend that you use an excellent enzyme cleaner to clean up the targeted areas outside the litterbox. Cats will repeatedly go to the bathroom in the same areas unless you clean the targeted area with an excellent enzyme cleaner. I recommend Anti-Icky-Poo.

Please keep in mind that cats who engage in unappreciated behaviors are doing so for a reason. They are not bad cats. Something in their environment is triggering their responses. The first step in solving the problem is to identify the causes or influencers of the behavior and then address the triggers. Please do not punish or yell at cats for unwanted behaviors. Punishment of any kind is inhumane and will result in cats becoming afraid of their people, escalating the behavior and/or developing other unwanted behaviors.