

## Why Won't Cat Use the Litterbox?

**CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, describes how to deal with avoidance issues.**

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**Q:** Our cat Daisy has started urinating on our sofa and any backpack or book bag left lying on the floor. Her litterbox is changed when needed (often). Daisy is a 2-year-old Persian-mix, she gets plenty of attention and is hardly ever left alone for more than an hour or two. Daisy has her own room when she wants to be alone — a spare room that she has claimed as her getaway/nap room. We have three children ages 7, 9 and 10 who treat her like a sibling, minus the arguing. We have consulted our veterinarian; urinary infection was a topic of concern, but this seems to be more of a behavior problem. We catch her in the act and take her to her litterbox, but she usually doesn't use it. We have changed brands of litter and still are puzzled. Please help.

**A:** A few factors are causing Daisy to prefer book bags and backpacks to litterboxes. More than likely, Daisy initially stopped using her litterbox because she had a urinary tract infection (UTI). UTIs are very painful, and often cats associate the pain of the infection with the litterbox, resulting in litterbox avoidance. After UTIs have been resolved, some cats continue to avoid the box, since they still associate the pain of the infection with the litterbox. The trick is to change the painful association with the cat box to something neutral or pleasant. This can be done a number of ways, including providing large uncovered litterboxes, providing Daisy with positive reinforcement when she's using the box, keeping the boxes meticulously clean, using unscented litter, as well as other management activities.

Another factor that might be influencing her to urinate on book bags and backpacks is less-than perfect litterbox management. Litterboxes should be scooped at least once a day and dumped and thoroughly cleaned at least every few weeks. Multiple large boxes also are needed. They should be uncovered and in different areas of the house. They need to be placed in locations where Daisy won't feel trapped. Showers, tubs and closets are not good locations for litterboxes.

Additionally, make sure that the book bags, backpacks and other targeted areas are thoroughly cleaned up with an excellent enzyme cleaner, otherwise Daisy repeatedly will target the same areas. Since all enzyme cleaners are not created equal, I recommend that you do your homework in order to find one that works.