

Dear Tabby

**Experts answer your kitten's questions in terms that humans can understand.**

*Marty Becker, DVM, and Janice Willard, DVM*

There's a box full of clay pellets in the laundry room. The humans seem to think this is really important but I'm not sure what to do with it. How can I learn?

Little kitty, that's your potty. "Humans assume that cats naturally understand what the litterbox is for, but the No. 1 reason cats are presented to veterinary behaviorists is because they aren't using their litterboxes," Aronson said. "Starting a kitten in a litterbox is easiest if he sees his mother using it. But even hand-reared kittens appreciate keeping the den clean and are fairly easily trained. A box of fluffy sand will generally stimulate a kitten over 5 weeks old to scratch in it." But a problem can arise if you find something else you like to use, like the carpet behind the sofa or papers that fell behind a desk. If your owners want to prevent such problems, they should limit your access to other possible potty substrates until you are using the appropriate one reliably.

"However, if the laundry room is a long way away from where you spend your time, the door sometimes gets shut, the dryer or washer are often in use banging and bumping, or other cats wait to ambush you, it is unlikely you're going to want to use the box," Aronson said. "Most times introducing the kitten to the box at a time when he's liable to need to potty after a meal, a nap or play time and giving him the space to do his thing without hovering over him, is usually all it takes. If he hops out of the box and goes elsewhere, then try 'seeding' the box with his earlier deposit. Gently take his front paws and help him dig in the litter. Most kittens will quickly get the idea provided they are old enough to pee and poop on their own."

Call me crazy, but I seem to chase invisible objects all over the room. Is this because my parents were a product of the '60s or am I normal?

To play or not to play, that is the question. To play is the answer, even if there is nothing around for you to play with. If you don't see what you want to chase, you'll chase it anyway. And, you will run from your invisible tag partner. Why? Because your need to chase and play and run is stronger than the lack of environmental cues. Humans aren't the only ones who like exercise. Cats in the wild lead a dynamic, active life. They never become obese and have an almost limitless amount of stimuli. In addition to hunting and killing dinner and courting and mating, wild cats are always on the lookout for hidden dangers. Your sixth sense may be telling you danger lurks around the corner, or dinner in the form of an invisible mouse just raced by.