

Missing Feces Raises Concern

Mother cat may be reverting to her wild instincts when it comes to her kittens' feces.

J. Veronika Kiklevich, DVM

Posted: Tue Jul 12 00:00:00 PDT 2005

Q. My friend took in a pregnant, feral cat and through all her love and patience, Gigi is now a happy member of the family. Both of the 5-week-old kittens are beginning to use their small litterbox. However, we are at a loss, as the fecal matter disappears.

Is the mother reverting back to the wild, where she disposed of the feces to keep predators from discovering her babies? Or, could she be eating it?

The mother has her own covered litterbox and does not use the kittens' box. Also, we've observed the kittens attempting to eat the litter. This can't be healthy, so I hope this is temporary.

A. Well, the feces must be going somewhere, and it wouldn't be all that odd for the mother cat to follow her instinct to clean up after her little ones. Though it seems gross to us, ingestion has worked for the survival of many cats in the wild for eons.

I am concerned about the kittens eating litter, and the mom eating litter-coated feces.

In the wild cats do not use convenient and absorbent clay. Dirt or leaf litter is the substrate they use and a tiny bit of dirt or leaves generally passes through them unnoticed. Clay, on the other hand, can harden in the digestive tract and form an obstruction. I've had to surgically intervene and remove these obstructions in many cats. Consider switching to a less-edible and more natural litter such as pellet, paper or even shredded paper. Clean the litterbox fanatically and discourage the kittens from eating the litter. You are wise to be concerned; however, it is a natural behavior or instinct for a mom cat to clean up after her young.