

What to Do When Your Cat Urinates Outside the Litterbox

Find out what a vet recommends for inappropriate urination.

Elaine Wexler-Mitchell, D.V.M.

Q. My cat started urinating outside the litterbox. What can I do?

Elaine Wexler-Mitchell, D.V.M., says: Urinating outside the litterbox and spraying are two different problems. Cats direct inappropriate elimination outside the litterbox onto horizontal surfaces, such as the floor, not onto vertical surfaces as in spraying. Inappropriate elimination is either caused by urinary tract disease or behavioral problems. Behavioral problems that may cause inappropriate elimination are difficult to determine because situations that create stress or anxiety for your cat may not be apparent to you.

Make sure that you are keeping your cats litterbox as clean as possible by scooping it twice daily. If you changed the type of litter you use in the litterbox, your cat may not like it; cats have preferences for certain types of litter. If there are no obvious litterbox factors, have your cat examined and her urine analyzed. If urinalysis and examination uncover a medical problem, your veterinarian will make treatment recommendations.

If there are no obvious medical problems, you need to work with your veterinarian or a behaviorist to identify the factors triggering the inappropriate elimination behavior. As with other behavior problems, the best chance for stopping inappropriate elimination is with early intervention. It is unrealistic to think that a behavior pattern that has been in existence for more than a couple of weeks can be turned around within a few days, so be patient and compliant with your vets recommendation. You will achieve the best results with a combination of behavior modification and antianxiety drug therapy. Give your cat plenty of attention and set aside at least five minutes twice a day to play with your cat to decrease stress and boredom and create a new behavior pattern.

You will need to clean and neutralize areas of elimination so that your cat is not attracted back to the same spot. Avoid cleaners with ammonia as they intensify the smell of urine and make your cat want to eliminate in the same area. In addition to cleaners, you can create an obstruction or spray a repellent on the affected area. To create an obstruction, simply close the door to the affected room, place an additional litterbox on the area, put a plastic carpet runner placed upside down on the area, lay down aluminum foil, or play with and feed your cat at the site. Repel your cat from affected areas using solid air fresheners with a fruity or flowery scent. Cats do not like fruity or flowery scents; they only like their own. There are numerous brands available in grocery and drug stores.