

Integrative Veterinary Care
Litter Box Aversion
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Cats can bring great joy to our lives. Occasionally they can also cause great consternation. It can be very frustrating to discover our favorite feline has suddenly decided they prefer to use our bath mat, carpet or the middle of our bed as their litter box. Yuck!

Don't despair. There are things we can do to solve this problem. First, we need to determine is this a physical problem, an emotional problem or a combination of both?

For example, cats with urinary tract infections (UTI) will urinate frequently, usually small amounts, in different areas around the house. They are uncomfortable, sometimes painful and this is their only way to let us know they have a problem. They need to see their Veterinarian where a procedure called a cystocentesis will be performed. Urine is drawn via a needle directly from your cat's bladder. The sample then undergoes analysis to determine if there are crystals, bacteria or blood present. If so, your Veterinarian will prescribe a treatment plan often requiring antibiotics and/or a food change. For more information about UTIs and treatment follow this link.

So what can you do if your cat is experiencing litter box aversion?

It is recommended we have one litter box per kitty and having different types of litter boxes is a good idea. Different heights, with tops, without tops, in different locations will help you to come to a solution with your cat. Try different types of litter in each box and rotate the litter until you come up with a combination that makes your cat happy. They may like a covered box that contains wheat litter or an uncovered box with cat crystals or...Experiment and strongly consider using a wonderful product called "Cat Attract". It is a litter additive that we have used with great success in encouraging cats back into the box. Their website has lots of information as well. <http://www.preciouscat.com>

Clean the area of inappropriate soiling with a product like Nature's Miracle or Out.

If they are urinating near door or window, the issue is probably something outside; a cat, dog or other stressor. Limit access to the area, either inside for your cat; you can decrease visibility from the inside by papering over the lower ½ of the window or glass block decals.

Or limit access from the outside for the stressor; redecorate outdoor area to decrease visibility using bamboo or other screening bushes, etc. You may need to eliminate a ledge if outdoor cats are coming to the window that way.

If your cat is soiling inappropriately in corners or behind furniture, limit access to these areas. Block them off or put down some form of deterrent like aluminum foil, double-sided sticky tape, knobby rubber mats or anything else your cat hates to walk on.

Try putting your cat's food in the area where they have inappropriately soiled. They generally don't like to eat where they potty.

The second area of concern and often the one we overlook, is the emotional well-being of our cats. Change is stressful for all of us even if it is a positive transition and some cats don't tolerate change well at all. What we perceive as a happy event like; introducing a new puppy or kitten into the household, having a baby, getting married, moving to a new home, changing our carpet, furniture or painting our walls, may be viewed negatively by our current feline resident. So what can we do to help them make this transition?

After verifying kitty does not in fact have a physical reason for their new and not so wonderful litter box habits, we can focus on making their environment safe and happy.

Other helpful hints:

If your cat is urinating on vertical surfaces, like a wall, this is usually a sign they are marking their territory. This behavior is not limited to male cats so don't be surprised if your female cat exhibits the same behavior. It is almost always related to stress of some sort, either social or otherwise.

If they are urinating on horizontal surfaces, especially in sinks, think medical issues, like a UTI.

If they are urinating on specific objects, like one child's clothes, objects that smell like perfume, etc. it's personal. They are trying to communicate something to you that you, in their view, have failed to appreciate.

For stress reduction- You want to increase the number of hidey holes, cat cubes are great for this and we often use them in clinic when a cat needs to stay for any length of time. It allows us access while giving them a sense of safety. You can find them at most pet stores. They are generally soft sided, fur lined cubes with a toy hanging from the top. Increase the amount of play time for your cat. This needs to be interactive, meaning you can use wand toys, laser pointers etc. to get kitty chasing, running and moving.