

Litter Box Problems: Indiscriminate Urination

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Litter box problems are the most common calls our office receives.

Here are some potential causes of litter box avoidance:

- Dirty box
- Wrong size box
- Covered box
- Not enough boxes for multiple cats
- Unappealing location
- Underlying medical condition
- Negative association with box due to current or previous medical condition
- Abrupt changes in litter brand
- Changes in the home (renovation, new furniture, etc.)
- Addition of new person (new spouse, baby, etc.)
- Addition of a new pet
- Loss of a companion (human, feline, or canine)
- Stressful household
- Age-related issues
- Move to new home
- Punishment

Here are three tips to guide you in the right direction:

1. Rule out potential medical causes. Even if you're sure the problem is behavioral, have your cat checked by the veterinarian. Cats are susceptible to urinary problems. There are also other medical conditions that can create litter box avoidance.
2. Re-evaluate box conditions. Make sure it's the right size box. If it's covered, remove the lid. Covered boxes limit escape potential. Be diligent about box cleaning – scoop the litter twice daily and thoroughly scrub it at least monthly. For multiple cats you need multiple boxes, and don't place the boxes in one area. Scatter them throughout the house so a lower-ranking cat doesn't have to pass through a higher-ranking cat's area. Don't put boxes in basements, closets, or other remote areas. If you think your cat may not like the current brand of litter, set out another box next to the original one with a different type and see which one she likes.
3. Household dynamics. Is one cat ambushing another in the box? Is there tension between your cat and a companion? Stressful conditions can create a fear of the box, especially if the cat has been attacked while in the box. Look at the areas where the cat is eliminating. If it's in open areas, she might need more escape potential in the litter box set-up. Create adequate space for multiple cats, and ease kitty through household

disruptions. Use playtime with an interactive toy as a stress-reliever. Add a pheromone diffuser. Make life fun again!

*For step-by-step help, refer my book, **Starting from Scratch** by Pam Johnson-Bennett.*

Additional Suggestions:

- Try Cat Attract kitty litter.
- Don't punish your cat; harsh treatment only contributes to a cat's stress. Reward your cat with treats immediately after she uses the litter box.
- Some old litter boxes become scratched and permeated with a scent your cat may find offensive. Add a second box in a different area. Place litter boxes in quiet, out-of-the way areas, away from bright lights and loud noises, and in areas not accessible to the family dog or toddlers. Try putting litter boxes on each level of a multi-level house. Do not put litter boxes near a cat's food dishes.
- Avoid ammonia based cleaners when you clean soiled areas. Try covering the soiled area with aluminum foil, or self-sticking shelf paper placed sticky side up. You can also try placing food in the soiled area.
- Stress is a leading cause of litter box problems.