



Solving Litterbox Problems

Cats tend to have surface and location preferences for where, and on what, they like to eliminate. Most cats prefer a loose, sandy substance, which is why they will use a litter box. It's only when their preferences include the laundry basket, the bed, or the living room rug, that normal elimination behavior becomes a problem. With a careful look around your cat's environment, specific factors that have contributed to the litter box problem can usually be identified and changed so that your cat will use the litter box for elimination again.

Medical Problems

It's common for cats to begin eliminating outside of their litter box when they have a medical problem. For example, a urinary tract infection or crystals in the urine can make urination very painful. Cats often associate this pain with the litter box and begin to avoid it. If your cat has a house-soiling problem, check with your veterinarian first to rule out any medical problems for the behavior. Cats don't always act sick even when they are, and only a trip to the veterinarian for a thorough physical examination can rule out a medical problem.

Cleaning Soiled Areas

Because animals are highly motivated to continue soiling an area that smells like urine or feces, it's imperative that you thoroughly clean the soiled areas with a neutralizing, enzymatic cleaner.

Aversion to the Litter Box

Your cat may have decided that the litter box is an unpleasant place to eliminate if:

- The box is not clean enough for her.
- She has experienced painful urination or defecation in the box due to a medical problem.
- She has been startled by a noise while using the box.
- She has been "ambushed" while in the box either by another cat, a child, a dog, or by you, if you were attempting to catch her for some reason—covered litter boxes often cause this problem.
- She associates the box with punishment (someone punished her for eliminating outside the box, then placed her in the box).

What You Can Do

Keep the litter box extremely clean. Scoop at least once a day and change the litter completely every four to five days. If you use clumping litter, you may not need to change

the litter as frequently. This will vary according to how many cats are in the household, how many litter boxes you have, and how large the cats are that are using the box or boxes.

Add a new box in a different location than the old one and use a different type of litter in the new box. Because your cat has decided that her old litter box is unpleasant, you'll want to try something new.

Make sure that the litter box isn't near an appliance that makes noise or in an area of the house that your cat doesn't frequent.

If ambushing is a problem, try to create more than one exit from the litter box, so that if the "ambusher" is waiting by one area, your cat always has an escape route. Make sure the litter box is uncovered.

Surface Preferences

All animals develop preferences for a particular surface on which they like to eliminate. These preferences may be established early in life, but they may also change overnight for reasons that we don't always understand. Your cat may have a surface preference if:

- She consistently eliminates on a particular texture. For example, soft-textured surfaces, such as carpet, bedding or clothing, or slick-textured surfaces, such as tile, cement, bathtubs, or sinks.
- She frequently scratches on this same texture after elimination, even if she eliminates in the litter box.
- She is or was previously an outdoor cat and prefers to eliminate on grass or soil.

What You Can Do

If your cat is eliminating on soft surfaces, try using a high quality, clumping litter, and put a soft rug under the litter box. If the cat isn't using any litter, try putting towels or puppy pads in a litter box.

If your cat is eliminating on slick, smooth surfaces, try putting just a very thin layer of litter at one end of the box, leaving the other end bare, and put the box on a hard floor.

If your cat has a history of being outdoors, add some soil or sod to the litter box.

Cut off access to the area where she is has been inappropriately urinating

Location Preferences

Your cat may have a location preference if:

- She always eliminates in quiet, protected places such as under a desk downstairs or in



Solving Litterbox Problems

a closet.

- She eliminates in an area where the litter box was previously kept or where there are urine odors.
- She eliminates on a different level of the house from where the litter box is located.

What You Can Do

Put at least one litter box on every level of your house.

Cut off access to the area where she has been inappropriately urinating.

Put a litter box in the location where your cat has been eliminating. When she has consistently used this box for at least one month, you may gradually move it to a more convenient location at a very slow rate, one inch per day.

Oops!

Don't punish your cat for eliminating outside of the litter box. If you find a soiled area, do nothing but clean it up. Rubbing your cat's nose in it, taking her to the spot and scolding her, or any other type of punishment will only make her afraid of you or afraid to eliminate in front of you.

If you're having trouble, please contact Homeward Pet Adoption Center's Animal Behavior Manager or another certified behavior professional for assistance. Litter box issues can usually be easily corrected, but may take some trial and error, creativity, and patience.