

Tiny Tigers Feline Rescue, Inc

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Litter Box Issues

One of the main reasons cats get surrendered to shelters is house soiling due to failure to use the litter box. First let's discuss some preventative steps, and secondly remedies.

Prevention

To minimize the chance of litter box problems developing consider these simple rules:

- Keep the box clean. Scoop regularly, change litter often and clean the box itself with mild detergent or weak bleach solution. Do not use strong smelling or potentially toxic cleaners without rinsing thoroughly. A good rule of thumb is scoop daily, change litter every 1 - 2 weeks, or as needed, and clean the box at the same time you change the litter. Covered boxes require even more vigilance because the fumes can stagnate under the hood, and your cat may find another place to relieve herself, more pleasant for her, less pleasant for you.
- Do not change litter abruptly. If you want to change brands. Put down two boxes, new and old. Gradually decrease the amount of old litter in the box. Remove completely when you are sure your cat has accepted the new litter, if he ever does!
- Make sure the box is easily accessible. Take your cat's age and condition into consideration. An older cat may need boxes on each level because he just can't make it from the second floor to the basement as fast as he used to. An ill cat also may need boxes on all levels. An arthritic cat may need a more shallow pan if she has difficulty getting in and out of a high sided or covered box. Small kittens need a smaller, shallower box to be able to climb in and out.
- If your cat has surgery on her paws, and you know what we are talking about, she may avoid the box because scratching in the litter hurts her. We do not advocate declawing, but if you do so, then take steps to make sure your cat is as comfortable as possible and use shredded newspaper or soft flushable litters until her paws heal.
- Spay and neuter early. Spaying and neutering before the age of 6 months decreases the likelihood that a cat will engage in marking behavior, which you may view as a failure to use the litter box.

Litter Box Issues, continued

Remedies

There is a difference between urinating or defecating outside the box and marking. Marking tends to be small amounts of urine on a wall or on the floor near a wall, and generally in the same one of two places over and over again. This is sometimes used as a defense mechanism by the cat when he or she feels insecure in the environment. It is more common in males but definitely occurs in females as well.

Urinating outside the box may also occur in the same spot again and again, but it occurs because the cat is drawn back to that spot by the odor. There are many reasons cats urinate or defecate outside the box. If the cat associates the box with something unpleasant, he will start to avoid it. Pain is a big reason. The first thing to do when a cat begins to go outside the box is take it to the vet for a check up. A urinary tract infection or a kidney stone may be the cause. In a multi-cat household, one cat may be harassed at the box and therefore choose to go elsewhere.

If you can discover the cause, then the remedy can be fairly simple. However, most of the time the cause remains a mystery, known only to the feline mind. First, consider everything mentioned above under prevention. Secondly, consider one, all or some of the following options:

- Thoroughly clean the spots that have been soiled with an enzyme cleaner.
- Confine your cat if necessary, while retraining him to use the box. There are detailed instructions for this in feline behavior books.
- Place food and or water bowls at the spot previously soiled.
- Cover the spot with plastic or foil to make it unattractive for your cat to walk on.
- Provide multiple boxes in multiple locations in multi-cat households. One box per cat is best, but usually you can get by two for one. However, as mentioned above you may need more than one, even for one cat.
- If you think your cat is marking or spraying because he sees another cat outside. Try to block his view with blinds or drapes.
- Some cats will urinate or defecate on tile or in the bathtub. These cats may prefer no litter in the box. Try using newspaper on the bottom of the box, or tilt the box using a pad or thin piece of wood. Put some litter in the low end. Your cat will use the end without litter and the urine will run down into the litter to be absorbed.
- Discuss anti-anxiety medication options with your vet. Any behavior altering medication must be combined with a behavior modification program.