

Litter Box Problems

Litter box problems are probably the biggest reason that cats are given up. However, if guardians just learned a few things that are important to watch out for there'd be many more happy guardians and kitties.

Kitties are by nature, very fastidious. They eliminate far away from where they eat and sleep. They cover what they eliminate. Because kitties have the instinct to cover their waste you don't have to 'train' them to use a litter box. When they do eliminate somewhere else in your house, there is a problem either with the kitty or the box.

Indiscriminate urination is when the kitty urinates on a flat surface like the floor, bed, sofa etc... This is not to be confused with spraying! There'll be an article on 'spraying' later. There can be a few reasons as to why this indiscriminate spraying has occurred. There can be a medical problem. There can be an emotionally stressing factor, (death in the family, a move, a new pet), or the kitty isn't happy with the litter box. It could be its location, (too near the food and water), or the litter box isn't clean. It could be that the kitty can't stand the type of litter you've chosen, (clay instead of newspaper granules). All of these problems, (except the medical), are pretty easily remedied IF you are observant.

There are medical reasons as to why a kitty would resort to indiscriminate urination. The kitty could be suffering from cystitis or a urethral blockage. These are also known as FUS, (feline urologic syndrome) or LUTD, (lower urinary tract disease). Either of these can kill. It's important to take your kitty to the veterinarian immediately to rule out either of these illnesses. For kitties prone to these disorders watch the amount of magnesium in their diet. Too much magnesium in kitty food is the main cause of LUTD! Feed good quality food, (Science Diet or ProPlan are good ones) rather than the 'tasty' supermarket brands. Unfortunately, when a kitty starts to urinate indiscriminately it usually is a sign of LUTD.

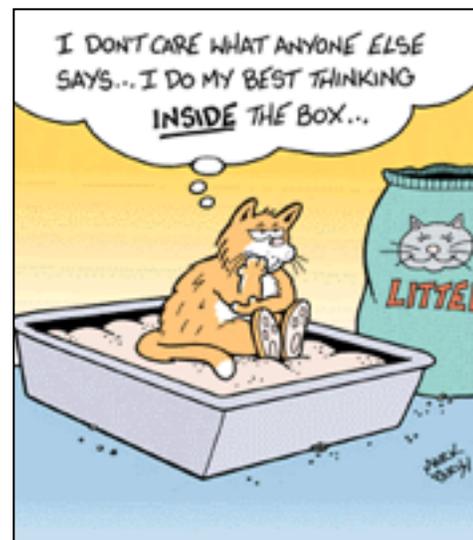
Here are some signs of LUTD:

- **urination outside the litter box**
- **frequent trips to the litter box**
- **straining or crying while trying to urinate (Don't confuse this with constipation!)**
- **small amount of urine**

- **blood present in the urine**
- **frequent licking of genitals**
- **slows down activity**

If you observe any of the above signs please see your veterinarian!

When you observe that your kitty is drinking more and more water this could be a sign of diabetes. He or she may drink so much water that they can't make it to the litter box. Older kitties have more trouble with their kidneys and any change in their litter box habits or eating and drinking behavior means: "take me to a veterinarian!"



Spraying

Just the word makes one's nose crinkle with the memory of the odor! Kitties spray to mark their territory. Usually it's intact males that spray, but females spray on occasion. Generally, once the kitty has been neutered or spayed the behavior stops, but for older kitties that have been spraying a while that may not be so. A cat that is spraying has a very different posture than the cat that is normally urinating. A cat that is spraying has an erect tail that is slightly vibrating. This isn't always the case. We have a neutered male cat that usually has his tail straight up in the air and he HAS NEVER sprayed. It can also be a form of greeting to those that he knows and trusts. Our female kitty is also spayed and often does the tail straight up in the air and quivering routine, but this is

done in pleasure, (when we're petting her). But, in general, when an un-neutered male cat is in this position it means he's spraying!

The spraying kitty will turn his back to the object and spray straight back. There are ways to help dissuade the kitty from doing this. First, clean the area thoroughly, (a liquid enzyme works the best). To find all the spots the kitty has sprayed use a black light, (usually available at pet stores). Make sure that you get a cleaner that neutralizes the odor! 'Nature's Miracle' works wonders. If neutering hasn't worked, and they are still spraying, thoroughly clean the spots, then place small dishes of dry food in the same area the kitty sprayed. The dishes don't have to stay there forever, but a few weeks of inconvenience may be inevitable.

Remember that kitties don't misbehave, (have an attitude). They are animals and are reacting to a situation. The guardian should try to figure out why the kitty is spraying. There are a variety of reasons why a kitty sprays. Usually it is in response to a threat to his territory. Is there a new cat in the neighborhood? Is a strange cat gaining access to your house somehow? Be observant AND patient and more than likely you'll discover why your cat has started spraying.

A dirty litter box will not only drive humans away it will also drive the kitty away. A litter box must be cleaned once a week. This means WASHING the container and REPLACING the litter! If there is more than 1 kitty in your household you may have to clean the entire box two or three times a week. A good rule of thumb is to give one litter box per cat, but at the very least clean the entire litter box once a week!

Plastic liners may be more work than they supposedly save. These get holes in them where the kitty has

scratched thus trapping urine underneath the liner. Pools of urine can collect in the corner of the box. All of this leads to a pretty smelly mess!

Use the right litter, (clay is preferred), and a good location, (away from food, where a kitty sleeps and high traffic areas). Use the right size of box! Use a regular cleaning schedule if at all possible. Avoid using strong d e t e r- gents to clean and rinse very thoroughly. Never use pine cleansers or ammonia, (smells a little too much like kitty pee...) and if you do want to use a disinfectant, mix it with water and rinse thoroughly. Use a slotted shovel to keep it odor free between cleanings.

If you remove the solid waste, (hopefully the wet will clump as well), the kitty is more likely to use the box longer period of time. Try and get the litter that is flush-able when scooping. It makes everything much easier!

A covered litter box confines odors so it is especially important to be diligent about cleaning! Litter in open boxes dries out more quickly than the closed kitty boxes so hooded litter boxes need to be cleaned more frequently. Add a little baking soda to your litter for odor control. It's cheap, won't hurt the kitties and is a great deodorizer!

Keep the box accessible, but not in high traffic areas. Don't move the box around too much, that would confuse the kitties. Don't put it on carpet. The kitty can get confused with the texture of the carpet and the litter.

Be patient when your cat doesn't use the litter box. Try and figure out the reason. There always IS a reason why and it's never because they want to make the guardian unhappy!



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Many of these suggestions came from Twisted Whiskers, a book written by Pam Johnson, a feline, behavior consultant.

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