

## Addressing Feline Inappropriate Urination:

1. **CALL YOUR VETERINARIAN** to discuss your cat's inappropriate urination. A veterinary appointment and physical exam are vital in helping ensure that your cat is healthy and does not have an underlying medical condition like bladder stones, feline idiopathic cystitis (*painful inflammation of the bladder lining that can sometimes become a true medical emergency*) or a urinary tract infection as these could be responsible for the unwanted behaviour your pet is exhibiting.
2. **REMOVE ANY COVERS OR LINERS** from your litterboxes:
  - a. Multi cat households often do better with uncovered boxes. Many cats do not like litterbox liners.
  - b. A cover means only 1 way in and out of the litterbox, which can be very stressful for a cat if they are sensitive or anxious about another cat approaching. Stress may cause them to stop using the litterbox all together.
  - c. Uncovered litterboxes also provide better air quality for your cat's lungs and nasal passages.
3. **USE A 3 STEP-PROCESS TO CLEAN THE AREA:** it is very important to not only disinfect the area, but to also fully remove the urine odour. A cat's sense of smell is highly advanced and can detect even faint traces of urine that humans are unable to appreciate.
  - a. **Step 1:** use a quality general cleaner (*ie Lysol*) and paper towel to thoroughly clean up the urine on all surfaces.
  - b. **Step 2:** disinfect with a diluted bleach 1:32 solution. ~ **30 ml bleach for every 1L of water.**
    - i. The area must have *all* organic material removed *before* the bleach stage or proper disinfection will not occur. You can also use the diluted bleach solution to disinfect litterboxes and litter scoops.
    - ii. Leave the bleach solution in contact with the area for **at least 10 minutes** to effectively disinfect.
  - c. **Step 3:** to completely remove any urine odours, which can encourage an animal to keep urinating in the same area, purchase an **URINE ENZYME** based cleaner and animal **URINE DEODORIZER.** (*ie Cat Odor-Off*)
    - i. Enzyme cleaners are designed to be sprayed and left to air dry.
    - ii. The enzymes will 'eat' the urine molecules and help ensure the smell is truly gone.
    - iii. These products can be purchased at or ordered in our clinic and in some pet stores.
4. **ADD ADDITIONAL LITTERBOX LOCATION(S):**
  - a. Ideal recommendation is **1 more litterbox than the number of cats** within the household.
  - b. There should be **least 1 litterbox on each level of your home**, especially for senior cats, those with mobility issues or chronic pain. Preferable placement is in an easily accessed, low-traffic, quiet area.
  - c. If a cat has stress or anxiety associated with their litterbox (*ie. due to tension between other cats within the house, washing machine nearby, kids, dog etc*), they may choose to urinate or defecate elsewhere to avoid the stressful situation. Additional locations provide an alternative for cats hesitant to use original site(s).
  - d. Even if 3 large litterboxes are available in the same location, it only really counts as **1 box** in the view of a cat. Litterboxes that are close together should be placed side-by-side instead of facing each other directly.
  - e. Remember, it may be difficult to tell if your cat is anxious or tense about their current litterbox location, but it is important to try this and eliminate it as being a key component of the unwanted behaviour your pet is exhibiting.
5. **SCOOP LITTERBOXES DAILY and DEEP CLEAN THEM EVERY 2-4 WEEKS:**
  - a. **Scooping daily (or more)** is important to decrease odours emitted from the litterbox. Many cats will opt to urinate or defecate elsewhere if their litter is not scooped frequently or if the odour from excrement is too strong.
  - b. Even with daily scooping, an offensive smell can still develop. This is due to the small pieces of contaminated litter that often remain behind after scooping as well as urine and stool that contaminate the box itself. Follow the steps above to **thoroughly clean** your cat's litterboxes and then fill it with fresh litter.
  - c. Using a clumping litter with **activated carbon** can help decrease litterbox odours (*ie Fresh Step Scoopable*). Cats tend to prefer activated charcoal when compared to baking soda (*sodium bicarbonate*) varieties.
6. Try **BLOCKING ACCESS TO THE AREA** that your cat repeatedly urinates inappropriately in (*ie. place a box, upside down laundry basket etc*) to reduce the opportunity to return to the frequently used space.

7. Evaluate the **STYLE OF LITTERBOXES** being used within the home:
  - a. A **low-level entrance** (*ie 3-4 inches*) into a litterbox is recommended for cats over 10 years old *or* those with a history of arthritis, mobility issues or any other chronic injury/pain.
  - b. **High sided litterboxes** (*only on 3 sides*) can help decrease inadvertent urine spillage from the litterbox, particularly with male cats that may have difficulty bending their hind limbs to urinate.
  - c. Cats will often prefer a **larger litterbox**, especially in multi pet homes or if mobility issues are present.
  - d. **Rubbermaid totes and plastic storage bins** can easily and inexpensively be made into custom litterboxes!
  
8. Consider placing a **TEMPORARY LITTERBOX** near the area(s) that your animal has been inappropriately urinating in to help reinforce urinating in the litter vs outside of it.
  
9. **OFFER NEW TYPE/BRAND of LITTER** in at least 1 of the litterboxes to see if your cat prefers a different litter type.
  - a. Many cats have very distinct preferences or dislikes of various litter varieties, while other cats can be more accommodating to whatever is being offered. Some also prefer a specific depth of litter within the box as well.
  - b. Strong scents can be considered offensive to some cats, especially citrus scent. Some cats prefer the smell of cedar.
  - c. Try an **UNSCENTED CLUMPING LITTER** as most cats prefer this type.
  - d. If already using unscented clumping litter, try other types to see if your cat opts to use those vs the current litter being offered ie. a scented litter, pelleted recycled newspaper litter (*ie Yesterday's News*), pine pellets or walnut, barely or corn based litter. These are can be ordered in our clinic or available in most pet stores.
  - e. If those litter types are not successful, consider trying a specialty '**litterbox attractant litter**'.
  - f. Some cats will prefer a certain type of litter for urinating in and a different type or location of litterbox for defecating. Offering a litter choice provides options in the event that your cat does have a specific preference.
  
10. **DO NOT SCOLD, YELL, OR PUNISH** your cat for inappropriately urinating. Animals do **not** associate the negative punishment to the action of urinating where they shouldn't. Yelling, chasing, scolding, or using the outdated 'rubbing their nose in it' is not useful and will often making the problem much worse.
  
11. **FELIWAY** (*artificial feline pheromone*) can help calm and reduce anxiety for cats, particularly in multi-cat households.
  - a. '**Original Feliway**' is available in a plug-in diffuser (lasts 30 days) or as an aerosolized spray.
  - b. Ensure you do not spray the product directly near your cat. Wait at least **15-20 minutes** before allowing your cat near a recently sprayed carrier, object or area.
  - c. '**Feliway Friends**' is a new formulation designed specifically for multi-cat households (*diffuser only*).
  
12. Ensure all **INDIVIDUAL CATS HAVE A SAFE PLACE** where they can relax away from other cats, dogs or children etc.
  - a. Purchasing cat towers can help a cat feel like they have a safe area and increase living space for your pet. This can reduce anxiety and stress as cats often feel more secure higher off the ground.
  
13. Provide **ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT** to help improve your cat's mental stimulation and overall contentment.
  - a. This can include exercise, rotating toys, using cardboard boxes with play holes cut out, laser play, cat nip, cat wands, food puzzles and balls, play structures to climb in and out of, window gazing etc.
  - b. *Supervising* your cat outdoors on a secure harness and lead and/or building a 'catio' (*fenced or enclosed area within a yard*) can be a wonderful outlet and source of stimulation for your pet.
  - c. A quick search online can provide abundant options, suggestions and easy do-it-yourself ways to enrich your kitty's indoor life.
  
14. If an underlying medical condition has been excluded and following the above suggestions do not improve your cat's inappropriate urination, discuss with your veterinarian if one of the **VARIOUS MEDICATIONS** available would be appropriate for your pet. Please do not give any medication to your pet without first consulting your veterinarian.

The above suggestions are a great place to start in helping resolve inappropriate feline urination. Remember, progress may not be made immediately as it can take some time to find the right combination of changes that work for your individual pet. Being patient, consistent and ensuring that you follow the above recommendations in full can really help give you and your animal the best chance of success.

Dr. Michelle Lange, *Veterinarian*

### Examples of Homemade Litterboxes:

- A variety of tools can be used to make the opening as wide as needed. Please ensure the cut edges are filed or melted to prevent injuries to your pet as they may be sharp.
- Your veterinary team would be happy to answer any questions or offer suggestions to help accommodate your cat's individual needs or medical condition when designing your custom litterbox.

