



# Litterbox Issues

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## **WHY HAS MY CAT STOPPED USING THE LITTER BOX?**

First and foremost, you must NOT punish the cat for inappropriate elimination behavior. Hitting (even gently), squirting water at it when urinating in the wrong place, clapping your hands or otherwise scaring, or picking it up and dropping in the litter box will NOT work. More than likely, punishment will escalate the problem.

### **MEDICAL REASONS**

- Before doing anything else, take kitty to the vet to make sure there is no medical problem. Be aware that if a cat straining at the litter box and is unable to urinate, this is an emergency situation that requires an immediate trip to the vet. If your cat suffers from urinary disease or is older, ensure that the cat can enter and easily, as climbing can become very painful and result not using the litter box.
- Sometimes if a cat hurts when using the litterbox, it will associate the litter box with the pain and will avoid it, even after the medical problem has been resolved.
- If your cat is male, unneutered, and spraying, this is NOT a litter box avoidance problem-your cat is marking is territory. He will back up to a wall, raise his tail, and then spray urine on the surface. In the vast majority of cases, neutering the cat will stop the problem.

### **SANITARY REASONS**

- Some cats will use the litter box even if it hasn't been cleaned for a week; others find another place to go if the litter box isn't scooped out daily. Some cats will "hold it" and cause themselves physical problems, while other will simply climb into a large potted plant or go on a rug.

### **LITTER/LITTER BOX REASONS**

- Be aware when adding a new cat to your household that he may have learned to use a particular kind of litter: some cats may have learned to like the "gravel" feel of clay litter; others may have learned to use the "sand" type clumpable; while still others may have used shredded newspapers.
- Some cats do not like covered litter boxes; others prefer them. Your cat may have an aversion to the scent or the amount of dust generated by scratching. You may have cleaned the litter box with a strong smelling cleaner that is irritating his nose.

### **LOCATION REASONS**

- Usually, a cat is most comfortable if the litter box is out of traffic patterns. If there is a lot of noise or people walking around, it may not be able to relax.
- Also, a cat needs to know that it can "escape"-if the litter box is in a location where it can't see other family members approaching (particularly if those members are likely to swat him as it is in or leaving the litter box), it will probably avoid it.

### **EMOTIONAL REASONS**

- This is much harder to diagnose and resolve. Some cats adapt to change without problems, while others have a very difficult time and show it by eliminating inappropriately. If your cat is now eliminating somewhere inappropriate, ask yourself some questions:
- Have you added a new member of the family (human, feline, canine, etc.), or has one left? Cats have a "pecking order" and the addition of a new cat can mean conflict if both are struggling to be "top cat."
- Is there a great deal of stress in your life, and are you showing it?
- Was kitty scared while in the litterbox, or possibly even just while in that room – a loud noise in the house or outside, or did something happen to him while he was using the litterbox?
- Did you recently move to a new home or apartment?
- Did you recently move the litterbox to a different location?
- Is kitty recovering from an illness?
- Is there a new cat in the neighborhood that your cat can see/smell?