

Feline Inappropriate Urination

Why? Cats urinate outside their litter boxes for 3 main reasons.

1. A medical problem in their urinary tract.
2. An acquired preference for a substrate other than cat litter.
3. Territorial marking behavior.

Urinary Tract Infections

It is common for cats to develop infections in their urinary tract. A special diet can help maintain urinary tract health for cats that are prone to these problems. Antibiotics are often needed and will rapidly make the cat feel better. Once the infection is treated, these cats will use their litter box again. Therefore, the first step for any cat urinating inappropriately is to have the cat and a urine sample evaluated by a veterinarian.

Substrate Preferences

Cats use litter boxes simply because it is their natural preference to eliminate in litter. If something such as a urinary tract infection, dirty litter box, or an undesirable litter box location causes them to dislike their litter box, they may simply stop using it. Sometimes in multi-cat households, one cat may consider the litter box part of his territory and torment another cat for using it. Some cats simply don't like a cover on the box. Cats often are very finicky about the cleanliness of the box, or they may not like the scent or feel of a certain litter. Here is an outline of litter box care that should keep most cats happy with their box:

1. Offer one more box than the number of cats in the household
2. Use unscented clumping litter
3. Scoop daily
4. Empty the box and clean it thoroughly weekly
5. Offer several litter box locations, preferably away from loud things like washers
6. Offer covered and uncovered boxes (many cats prefer uncovered)

This level of cleanliness may not be required for every cat. Not all cats prefer clumping litter. The key is to offer your cat different types of litter, different boxes, and different locations and see which ones he or she will use. Keep the litter box as clean as you possibly can. Some cats may need to be confined to a small room with food, water, and litter box for several days to get back into the habit of using the box.

Marking Behavior

Some cats will urinate in certain spots to mark their territory. These cats can spray vertical surfaces with urine, or they may urinate on horizontal surfaces. They will usually use many different places rather than picking only 1 or 2 special spots. Most of these cats live in multi-cat households. Others are responding to cats they see outside, or just doing this by instinct. If the urination is truly caused by marking, it can sometimes be controlled with medication. Some of these cats must be medicated for life. There are several medications available for this purpose, and we commonly must try several before we find one that works for a particular cat.