

HOUSE SOILING IN CATS

Cat owners frequently consult us in some distress because their cat has taken to urinating and even defecating in the house, possibly electing to avoid the litter tray altogether and sometimes even showing a preference for their owner's bed. This is of course totally unacceptable and we will try and address some of the issues that may be behind this breakdown in feline hygiene.

The problem can initially be broken down into two categories,

- a) Physical
- b) Psychological

Physical

1. It is not uncommon for both male and female cats to have bladder problems, i.e. cystitis. This is inflammation of the bladder and leads to pain on urination. When a cat experiences pain on emptying its bladder, it will often attempt to distance itself from the pain and in doing so, will urinate in many different places. Sometimes only very small amounts are passed at a time and may be blood stained. If this is noticed, it is most important to seek veterinary advice immediately. Leaving a cat with cystitis could lead to a blocked bladder causing excruciating pain and ultimately kidney failure. Male cats, particularly placid and rather overweight ones are more commonly affected, but female cats may also suffer. A poor diet, insufficient exercise and not enough fresh water may precipitate bladder problems. Kidney problems in older cats, where drinking is increased in an effort by the cat to remove the toxins accumulating in its system, may also have the effect of increasing urine output.



2. Young kittens can sometimes have trouble locating the litter tray if they have been given the run of the house. If their digestions are upset in early days, it is highly possible that they may literally be "caught short" if the litter tray is not in easy reach. It is usually preferable to limit their range to just a few rooms until their knowledge of the litter tray whereabouts is well established. If a cat or kitten has started to use an area other than its litter tray, it is most important that it is removed from being able to access that particular area for some time. It may be that, after thorough cleaning, a piece of furniture could be placed over the offending area. By doing this, the cycle of habit is broken quickly.

3. Cats of all ages can have what is known as a substrate preference, that is to say, they prefer using one particular type of litter to the exclusion of others. In general, a finely ground mineral type is preferable and not too highly scented. If you have recently changed your brand of kitty litter, it could be that the new variety does not meet with Puss's approval.

Psychological.

This is where we have to put on our thinking caps and try to decide what has happened to upset our cat. Inappropriate elimination is a cat's way of telling us that it is upset with something that is happening in its life. Now this can be any number of events, ranging from a new kitten or puppy, a new addition to the household, builders or decorators or possibly the arrival in the neighbourhood of some new feline despot. The issue upsetting your cat may be trifling to you and hard to identify, but of very major significance to Kitty.

When a cat is attending to its toilet, it is vulnerable. Unlike us, it cannot close the door of the smallest room. If its safety is threatened, then this is the time when it could easily be attacked by the local bully. The cat therefore looks upon the safety of its own home to relieve itself, in the knowledge that the local bully is unlikely to be lurking behind the sofa or in the corner of the bedroom. It could be however, that the local bully is actually a member of its own household, quite possible nowadays when it is not at all uncommon to find two to six cats sharing the same home. Feline bullying in the same household is quite insidious and not always apparent to the untrained eye. But it can be this fact that is causing the victim to lose his cool.

POSITIONING OF LITTER TRAYS:

Although this is frequently not the answer that owners want to hear, one of the best ways of encouraging your cat to eliminate in the correct place, is the provision of several well-placed litter trays in quiet areas of your home. This should equate to one litter tray PER CAT and one to spare! If you have always been used to your cat using the garden for his toilet, then this may come as an unacceptable alternative, but as the numbers of cats increases, is it really fair to allow your cat to target next door's flower beds on a daily basis? Maybe putting a litter tray in a downstairs cloakroom, garage or utility room is an alternative? Any of these is preferable to the carpet. Ideally the litter tray should be placed in a quiet and private area of the home and preferably a corner. This means that attack realistically could only come from the front. If a cat is highly nervous, a covered tray may be the answer, but only if they accept it readily and are used to this idea. It works for some, but not for all.

REMOVAL OF STRESS FACTORS:

Increasing the number of feeding areas in the house can also remove a stress factor. If the victim can enjoy his food in complete peace then his overall demeanour is likely to be improved. It also renders it impossible for the dominant feline of the group to prevent access to all feeding stations at all times and in time this type of assertive behaviour will phase out.

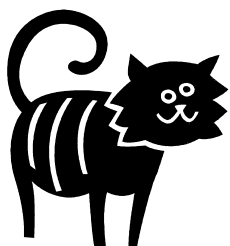
The positioning of the litter tray should not be too close to the food bowls. This is quite often overlooked, but after all, we would not want to eat our meals next to the toilet either. Cats are fastidious and clean by nature. They never, ever, eliminate to annoy or spite you: they are doing it because there is something fundamentally wrong in their lives.

REMOVING TEMPTATION:

If a cat has shown a preference for urinating on its owner's bed then quite clearly this habit must be addressed rapidly. Cats have a tendency to revisit the scene of the crime and in the short term, access to the particular bedroom where the event has happened must be prevented. Keeping the bedroom door firmly shut for a period of up to two weeks should hopefully break the cycle and laundering of bed linen should be carried out using non-biological detergent. The depositing of faeces on the owner's bed, whilst clearly highly distressing for the owner, is indicative of an almost panic-stricken cat. What else can Puss possibly do to alert you to the fact that his life really has become unbearable? This really is a cry for help in no uncertain terms and it requires a drastic change in your cat's regime to help him come to terms with upsetting circumstances. The arrival of a new puppy in the household could be a factor which may initiate this type of distress.

The next problem to be addressed is probably one of the more complex and that is scent marking. This is where your cat stands with his tail erect and sprays a horizontal jet of urine, usually onto a hard surface, whilst simultaneously paddling his back feet. This can also be performed by adult females and neutering does not always amend the habit. Use of a water pistol at strategic times can be a help. Unfortunately cats tend to revisit the preferred sites to re-establish their scent and in doing so, reassure themselves that all is well in their domain. The use of a pheromone spray which we can supply can greatly help with this problem. The scent is undetectable to all but cats who find it essentially calming and this can also help prevent them clawing at wallpaper and furniture.

Our Surgery can provide a plug-in diffuser of synthetic feline pheromones (**Feliway**) which is proven to have an effect on relieving stress in cats. Again, this is odourless but when left plugged in at a strategic point can be very beneficial, particularly in multi-cat households. Refills can be bought, each lasting approximately one month. We highly recommend this especially at such times as moving house, home improvements or perhaps a new addition to the family.



Inappropriate elimination is a complex subject in the cat and we have really just outlined some of the more common aspects. But when an underlying medical condition has been ruled out, it is almost always an expression of unease in the environment. Our vets and nurses will always be happy to discuss a certain problem with you and if all else fails, provide a referral to a feline behaviourist.