

FACTSHEET

Litter training

Cats are very clean animals and will usually quickly adapt to using a litter tray. It is important to remember that as cats are clean animals, they can also be fussy. You might need to try many different types of litter until you get one your cat will use. There are many types available including recycled paper, wood pellets, crystal, clay, wood shavings, tofu, and corn. If your cat has been used to going to the toilet outside previously, you might try a little dirt in the tray to begin with, so your cat feels familiar with it. Even cats with outside access should have a litter tray inside for emergencies. You can then start changing to a litter you and your cat are happy with. Avoid using scented litters and they can often be too strong for your cat and may cause them to stop using the litter tray.

Most cats also like privacy. Make sure the litter tray is in a place that isn't a busy area of the house. There are many 'hooded' litter trays available that offer additional privacy (and help to minimise mess). Make sure the tray is the right size for your cat or kitten. If it is too small the cat could miss the tray; if it is too big your kitten might not be able to get in.

The litter tray needs to be as long as your cat and they should have enough room to comfortably turn around when inside it. If the tray is too small your cat may be trying to use it correctly, but they may be missing the tray due to size. Avoid placing the tray in an area where your cat is obstructed from crouching to use the tray. An area in between a bath and a toilet for example, may be convenient for us but if your cat is hitting their head every time they want to use the tray or feeling squashed, they will not want to use the tray. When we go to the toilet we like to be comfortable, so does your cat.

The rule of thumb for litter trays is having a litter tray for each cat you have, plus one extra. This will ensure that even if one litter tray is dirty, your cat has somewhere to go. You should scoop your cat's litter tray at least daily and fully replace the litter according to the product recommendations. A cat's sense of smell is better than ours and as their urine has a high concentration of ammonia, many cats will not want to return to a litter tray after a few times of urinating in it. Its very important to avoid using perfumed cleaning products when cleaning your cats litter tray as the smell can stay in the plastic of the tray and cause your cat to stop using the tray.

Its also important to note that some cats prefer a tray to urinate in and a different tray to defecate in. This is a very common occurrence.

If you are training a kitten to use the litter tray, start by placing the kitten in the tray after they've eaten. This will help them to learn where the litter tray is. Whenever you see the kitten squat, put them in the litter tray. If the kitten goes to the toilet somewhere else, pick up the kitten and put them in the tray. **Never** rub your kitten's face in it; this will hurt your kitten and won't help them learn where you want them to toilet. Clean the mess up, avoid using any bleach-based products as these will attract your cat to the same spot. Try using an enzyme odour neutralizer to remove any trace of odour. If the kitten goes back to the

spot, try placing a few bits of dry food there, as cats don't like to go to the toilet near their food.

Make sure your kitten can see the litter tray and try having a few in various spots until the kitten is going to the litter tray all the time. If the kitten still isn't using the tray after a few days, try putting the kitten in the bathroom or laundry with the litter tray for 24 hours, this will often help as they can easily see where the tray is. Younger kittens often get overwhelmed with large spaces and this can cause them to use the litter tray incorrectly.

If your adult cat suddenly stops using the litter tray take them to a vet as soon as possible. There are a number of medical problems that could cause your cat to display this behaviour. If your cat is found to have no medical problems, try placing another litter tray in the house, cleaning the litter tray more often, or changing the type of litter. Consider whether there are any changes in your household that may be stressing the cat. Refer also to our factsheet on [Unwanted toileting behaviour](#).

If you have a multi-cat household, try placing a new litter tray in a secluded spot, as your cat/s may be shy or the litter tray may be guarded by the more dominant cat. This sounds strange but it does happen. Even if your cat goes outside, you still need to provide a litter tray for your cat indoors as they might not feel comfortable going to the toilet outside where other cats are.

Always use an odour neutraliser after cleaning up any mishaps, otherwise your cat will be able to smell where the mess was and might continue returning to that place.

If your cat is stressed you could try a behaviour intervention like calming treats, 'Zylkene' or 'Feliway'. 'Feliway' replicates the pheromones cats emit from cheek glands when they are happy. This scent is not strong enough for humans to smell but cats can smell it and it can help them to relax.

Litter training for your cat is often a case of trial and error. Some cats can be very fussy with their toileting, and you may need to try a few different trays or litter, until you find the type they like. As your cat gets older, they may also have problems using a tray they used before due to arthritis or may need a different litter if they become more sensitive to touch.

If you are concerned about your cats' toileting habits at any time, speak to your vet or contact a behaviour consultant.

While all care has been taken in preparing this document, it is intended to provide general information only and should not be taken as constituting professional advice. Mention of a product or business does not mean endorsement by Cat Protection.