

FACTSHEET

Unwanted Toileting Behaviour

Unwanted toileting behaviour is usually when a cat urinates or defecates anywhere other than the litter tray. Urination differs from spraying behaviour as it is when the cat crouches and urinates, as they would if using the litter tray.

This behaviour can be shown for several reasons including stress, dirty litter tray, unable to get to litter tray, or illness. It is very important to **first** get a vet check if your cat is showing this behaviour to ensure illness is not the cause. If illness is ruled out by your vet, you now need to find out what is causing the behavior.

Litter tray problem

Cats are very clean animals and a litter tray that may seem clean to us may be dirty to them. A cat's urine contains ammonia which can often smell a lot stronger to your cat than to you, as their sense of smell is heightened. As a general rule, you should have a litter tray for each cat in the home plus a spare one. This will help to prevent this problem. Try cleaning the tray more frequently and scooping out any faeces as soon as possible. Covered litter trays can often contain the smell and make it even stronger to the cat.

If the tray is clean and your cat isn't using it, you may need to try a variety of litters to see which one your cat prefers. Avoid using scented litters, they may smell nice to us but some of the scents are very strong to your cat. See our factsheet on [Litter Training](#) for more ideas.

The size of the litter tray can also impact how your cat uses it. If the tray is too small the cat may actually be hovering over the side and missing the tray by accident. Your cat should be able to easily walk around in a circle while in the tray. The tray should be as long as your cat to avoid mishaps.

Also look at where you have the tray. Cats like to go to the toilet in peace and quiet, just like we usually do, so ensure the tray is in a quiet area and not a high traffic area. You will need to make sure your cat can get in and out of the tray easily too. Placing the tray between the bath and the toilet might be a convenient place for you but can your cat comfortably get into the tray and crouch?

If you live in a multi-cat household, you may need to look at whether your cat is being bullied by one of the other cats when trying to reach the litter box. This isn't always obvious and can be as subtle as one cat staring at the other cat continuously when the other cat is trying to use the tray.

Avoid using strong scented cleaning products when changing the tray as they may be offensive to your cat and make them avoid using the tray.

Stress related problem

Cats can be easily stressed and even the slightest change in routine may cause stress. Try to work out whether anything has changed in your cat's routine as this may be the trigger for the toileting behaviour. Something as simple as when you feed the cat or what time you get home may cause your cat stress. In these cases, your cat will usually stop displaying the behaviour once a routine has been re-established. In the meantime, you will need to ensure you remove all solid matter from soiled areas and clean the area with a non-bleach product. You should try to use an odour neutralising agent such as Biozet. You can also try using a citrus- based cleaner as most cats do not like citrus and will thereafter avoid the area. There are some great products on the market that are odour eliminators, such as 'Urine Off', which will help get rid of any residual smell that you may not be able to detect but your cat can. Never use a bleach or ammonia based product in the area as this will smell like urine to your cat and can attract them back to the area, making the issue worse.

You should try to limit access to problem areas until your cat is showing more relaxed behaviours. Never become aggressive to your cat after they have displayed the behaviour as this will only cause your cat to become more stressed. **NEVER** rub your cat's nose in the area, as a cat's nose is very sensitive and you will hurt your cat. Avoid yelling at your cat if they toilet somewhere you don't want them too as this may cause other behaviour issues.

Are there stray cats in your area, or a new cat who has outside access? Often a new or stray cat in the area can upset your cat and this can cause them to toilet outside the litter box.

Try to reward the cat with pats and a treat when they use the litter tray, as this will reinforce positive behaviour. You could also try calming medications such as calming treats, 'Zylkene' or a pheromone diffuser or spray such as 'Feliway' in your home, as these will relax your cat and help re-establish your cat's routine faster.

Most importantly, be patient. We have worked with many people who have successfully corrected this behaviour in their cats. Some cats are more easily stressed than others and some breeds are more susceptible to showing this type of behaviour problem. Keep in mind, your cat is not being spiteful or misbehaving when displaying this type of behaviour, there is always a reason behind it.

If the problem continues, consult your vet about whether behaviour modifying medication could help your cat.

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