



Onion River Animal Hospital
2386 Airport Rd., Berlin VT
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Inappropriate Elimination in Cats

Urinating outside litter box

One of the most common behavioral and health problems cats have is eliminating outside the box. In some cats, this is a sign of a urinary tract problem, such as urinary tract infection, increased urine production (diseases like diabetes, and many others, cause this), urinary pain from crystals/stones, and other primary urinary problems. For defecating outside the box, it may be a sign of bowel discomfort due to constipation or diarrhea. For cats with urine marking, the problem may be a sign of anxiety or stress in the cat, and respond to medication for anxiety. For cats with inappropriate elimination which is neither marking nor medical, improving the nature of the litter box and retraining their habits is key. For some of these cats, anxiety is also a component.

The first step in evaluating general and urinary health. There were no abnormalities on your pet's recent exam. Sometimes additional diagnostics like urinalysis and blood work are necessary.

We also need to talk about FLUTD, which is a painful bladder condition in cats. At this point, your cat does not have signs of this disease.

For cats eliminating outside the litter box, medications can help. Additionally behavioral modification using confinement so that they only have one place to eliminate (the litter box) is highly effective in getting the cat to resume consistent litter box use. This may also require making changes to reduce the availability of other places your cat is currently using (picking up throw rugs, putting laundry in closed bins, etc) to help change the cat's habits.

We do not know why some cats become stressed by what may seem like small changes in their household, especially since other people and cats in the house may not show similar signs of stress. However, we do know that cats frequently eliminate inappropriately when stressed or as a response to anxiety and may do so repeatedly.

Once a cat starts using an inappropriate place to urinate or defecate, it may become habit, or attract other cats to use that place inappropriately also. Use a specially designed pet-odor-reducing cleaner like Roxy and Roxy or something similar.

If your cat is eliminating in one spot consistently, put a litter box there.



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Help Your Cat Like To Use The Box

Cats can be finicky about their litter boxes. Here are some things you can do to help ensure your litter boxes are attractive and not off-putting to your cats. We want to make the boxes some place the cat **wants** to go, rather than a place the cat avoids.

1. **Plenty of boxes.** Have one more box than you have cats: if you have 3 cats, have 4 boxes. Cats often want to go all at the same time, first thing in the morning. If all the boxes are occupied, someone may end up going outside the box.
2. **Clean boxes.** Make sure all boxes are cleaned every day. No one wants to use a dirty box.
3. **Consistent litter substrate.** Some cats don't like change. If you're not sure what litter your cat likes, you can line up a row of boxes with different types of litter and see which one the cat uses. If your cats have been consistently using a specific litter type, don't change it. Change in litter type (particle size, substance, smell, etc) can make the box unattractive and make a cat stop using the box.
4. **Boxes nearby.** If you have multiple levels, have a box on every floor/story of your house. If your house is large, make sure there are boxes at each end of the house so that cats don't have to travel really far to use one.
5. **Easy to access.** Make sure at least some boxes are easy to access. If a box is behind a closed bathroom or bedroom door, the cat can't get to it. Upstairs, downstairs, over/under baby gates, and otherwise hard to access boxes may deter a cat which is tired, sore, or needs to go urgently. If you have an older cat or a cat recovering from injury, low-sided boxes that are easy to step into, or ramps leading into higher-sided boxes, can make it easier to use the box even with sore legs. Boxes should be 1.5 times the length of the cat. You can use plastic storage bins or other items that are adequate in size and shape if commercial boxes are too small.
6. **No scary things nearby.** If the box is next to the laundry machines for example, and they are noisily running, it may scare off a cat. High traffic areas, places near dogs, or ones requiring the cat to go past an aggressive cat housemate may all keep the cat from feeling comfortable going to, and sitting in, the box. Try to place the boxes where they are peaceful to enter and use.
7. **Privacy.** Try using covered, top-entry, or other box styles (without removing the old style boxes) to see if your cat is more comfortable using a box that gives the cat more privacy.



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8. **Humor preferences.** If you aren't sure what your cat likes, offer a litter box buffet – a row of different boxes (covered, open, automatic; clumping, clay, other litter types, etc) so you can find out what your cat prefers to use. Sometimes finding the right combination does the trick.

Husbandry and Management for Inappropriate Elimination

In addition to the already discussed changes in the litter boxes themselves, there are household or environmental management changes that can help reduce the cat's anxiety and significantly improve behavior.

Visit the Indoor Cat Initiative for helpful tips on making your indoor cat's life as enriched as possible.

<http://indoorpet.osu.edu/cats/>

Some helpful things you can do include:

- Place Feliway diffusers in all rooms (see package for details). If unable to put them in all spaces, put them in places where the cat eliminates to help reduce the cat's stress in these areas.
- Offer high perches such as cat trees, empty shelves, etc. for your cat to enjoy
- Ensure each of your cats have one-on-one play and quality time with you; even 10 minutes twice a day can really help relax your cat and help your cat feel less stress.
- Give your cat a room of his/her own – an entire room, a closet, bathroom, or large crate – where your pet can retreat when desiring alone time.
- Have night lights where cats sleep in multi-cat households so no one gets startled by other cats moving around in the dark.
- Try to keep to a similar daily routine in which events, such as meals, happen at consistent times.
- Try to avoid having heavily scented items near the cat's favorite hangouts, litter box, and food. Heavy scents in these areas may deter the cat from using them or make the cat uncomfortable when she/he does use them.

Eliminate attractive places to go: Pick up bathmats and throw rugs. Place clean and dirty laundry in closed closets, baskets with lids, or other inaccessible areas. Use of scatmats and other deterrents can



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also help keep cats off of places they used to go. If you know that your closet is a common place to find urine, try an SSSCat next to the entrance.

Medication for Urine Marking and Anxiety in Cats There are many medications available to help treat anxiety in cats. Depending on the severity of the case, we use pheromones (“Feliway”), clomipramine, fluoxetine, alprazolam, and/or other medications. We will talk with you about which, if any, medication(s) are appropriate.

Onion River Animal Hospital is committed to reducing fear and stress responses in all our patients!

