

# Solving Litterbox Problems

Cats tend to have surface and location preferences for where, and on what, they like to eliminate. Most cats prefer a loose, sandy substance, which is why they will use a litterbox. It's only when their preferences include the laundry basket, the bed or the Persian rug, that normal elimination behavior becomes a problem. With careful analysis of your cat's environment, specific factors that have contributed to the litterbox problem can usually be identified and changed, so that your cat will again use the litterbox for elimination.

Some common reasons why cats don't use the litterbox are: an aversion to the box, a preference for a particular surface not provided by the box, a preference for a particular location where there is no box, or a combination of all three. You'll need to do some detective work to determine the reason your cat is house soiling. Sometimes, the reason the litterbox problem initially started may not be the same reason it's continuing. For example, your cat may have stopped using the litterbox because of a urinary tract infection, and has now developed a surface preference for carpet and a location preference for the bedroom closet. You would need to address all three of these factors in order to resolve the problem.

Cats don't stop using their litterboxes because they're mad or upset and are trying to get revenge for something that "offended" or "angered" them. Because humans act for these reasons, it's easy for us to assume that our pets do as well. Animals don't act out of spite or revenge, so it won't help to give your cat special privileges in the hope that she'll start using the litterbox again.

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## Medical issues

- Before you try anything else, have your vet **rule out a medical condition** such as a urinary tract infection or urinary crystals. It's common for a cat to begin eliminating outside of the litterbox because of a urinary health problem. These can be very painful, and your cat may associate that pain with using the litter box.

## Cleaning Soiled Areas

- **Clean pet stains with an enzymatic cleaner** like Nature's Miracle to fully eliminate the odor to your cat. If they can still smell urine or feces, they will be motivated to continue to eliminate in that spot.

## Aversion To The Litterbox

Additional reasons your cat may have decided that the litterbox is an unpleasant place to eliminate:

- The box is not clean enough.
- Your cat has been startled by a noise while using the box.
- Your cat has been "ambushed" while in the box either by another cat, a child, a dog, or by you, if you were attempting to catch her for some reason.
- The litterbox is associated with punishment (someone punished her for eliminating outside the box, then placed her in the box).

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### Possible solutions

- Use the enzymatic cleaner to **deep clean the litter box** in addition to the spots around the house. It's very possible the smell could have embedded itself into the plastic and it's just too stinky, even if the litter is completely fresh and clean.
- **Get a second (or third) litter box** in a variety of styles (ex: covered vs. uncovered). For multi-cat households, the rule of thumb is to have one litter box per cat in the house, plus one additional box. If you have multiple levels in your home, it is recommended to place a litterbox on each level.
- If you're using an **automatic litter box**, that could be part of the problem. It is not unusual for cats to be afraid of the noise and/or motion of automatic boxes.
- Make sure your **litter box is in a private area**. If it's positioned near a dryer or a radiator, the noise of those appliances may have frightened your cat while she was using the litter box.
- **Scoop the litter box every day**. Some cats are finicky and demand a clean litter box – can you blame them (ever use a Port-A-Potty)?
- **Experiment with different litter types** to see which the cat prefers. Preferences can change over time. There is a wide array of litter types available, so you might have to try a few out before you find one your cat really likes.
- Try **Cat Attract litter** – it is very effective for improving litter box usage with cats who do not use the litter box consistently.
- **Is litter box is large enough?** It may just be too cramped for your cat.
- **Make the area where she has been eliminating unappealing** by covering it with upside down carpet runner or aluminum foil, or by placing citrus-scented cotton balls over the area

### Environmental issues

- If it's not something directly related to the litterbox that is causing improper elimination, is there something that may be causing anxiety or stress to your cat (anything from a new baby to a rearranged living room)? Many cats become very routine creatures, so change and the anxiety it may impose on your cat can also be a cause of improper urination. If that might be the case, use **Comfort Zone with Feliway diffuser** in the area where they are improperly eliminating. It spreads calming, odor-free pheromones into the air which help relax stressed out kitties.
- If you can, provide the cat with a quiet dog and kid-free zone to relax in. It's also important that the litter box area is also a dog-free zone.

**If all else fails, you may need to retrain your cat.** Secure your cat in a small room like a bathroom, or even a large cage, with their food, water, bed, and litter box. Cats don't like to go to the bathroom near their food or where they sleep, and in a small space, they will have little choice but to use the box. Keep doing this for at least a week.

If the above suggestions don't help solve the problem, the cause may be a deeper emotional problem. As a last resort, you may want to talk to your vet about anti-depressants or anti-anxiety medication which can work wonders with cats who inappropriately eliminate for behavioral reasons.



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