

Cats Soiling indoors



Urination and defecation in the wrong place

The cat is usually fastidious about its toilet habits and will consistently use a litter tray indoors if it is provided, or loose earth or sand outside in the garden.

Therefore, if urine or faeces are discovered in the corner of the room it can be very worrying. Occasionally a one-off accident can occur if a cat is ill, trapped in a room or suddenly frightened. If inappropriate urination or defecation in the home persists it should be investigated for the health and welfare of the cat.

Whatever the cause, punishment is not the answer. This will only make the cat fearful and the problem worse.

Deterrents, such as tin foil, pepper, citrus peel or a water pistol will merely redirect the behaviour to another site, cause further anxiety and delay investigating the root cause for the behaviour.

Important!

Despite the unpleasant nature of this problem it is important to remember – this is not a dirty protest! The cat is not seeking revenge or making a point; something has gone wrong in its world and a certain amount of detective work is required to find out what.

What is the difference between urine spraying and inappropriate urination?

Cats use urine as a scent signal or 'mark' for themselves and other cats. Depositing urine for scent marking is very different to urinating to relieve a full bladder. It is therefore important to establish whether the cat is spraying or urinating since the potential solutions will vary. To urinate, the cat squats and deposits a volume of urine on a horizontal surface. The cat may then scratch at the area around the urine, although this is not always the case. Common sites for inappropriate urination include carpet, settees, duvets, baths or sinks although it may occur in any location.

To spray urine the cat stands up, usually making a treading motion with its back feet, quivers its tail and a small amount of urine is sprayed backwards onto a vertical surface such as a wall, leaving an obvious scent mark. Common sites for spraying include doors, windows, around cat flaps, curtains, electrical equipment and shopping or rubbish bags. Once it has been ascertained which of the two the cat is doing it is necessary to take action to resolve the behaviour. See our information on [urine spraying](#)

How do I clean the soiled area?

Whether a genuine accident or not, once the cat has urinated or defecated at a particular location its sensitive nose will encourage it to use that place as a regular toilet.

The best way to break the habit is to keep the cat away from the area as long as possible, remove any smell that the cat can detect and maybe change the geography of the location by using pieces of furniture to block access.

Wash the area with a 10% solution of biological or enzymatic washing powder and then rinse with cold water and allow the area to dry thoroughly. This method works best when the amount of liquid used is minimal to avoid over-saturating, particularly when cleaning carpet. Once the area is dry, the final step of the cleaning process is to spray lightly with surgical spirit (using a plant mister), scrub gently and leave to evaporate. You may want to try a small area first on delicate fabrics.

Commercially produced enzymatic cleaners are also available specifically for the purpose of removing the stain and odour of cat urine and faeces. Carpet is extremely absorbent and urine often penetrates the full thickness of the carpet to the flooring underneath. If the area is badly soiled with urine over a long period it may be necessary to cut out the section of carpet and underlay and treat the concrete or floorboards underneath before replacing.

Why does my cat soil indoors?

There are numerous reasons why an individual cat would start to soil indoors. In some cases the problem can be persistent and it is advisable to discuss it with your veterinarian rather than leave it to resolve on its own. If this is the case your vet will refer you to a specialist in cat behaviour.

Some of the more common reasons for house soiling are:

Dirty litter trays. Cats don't like using a tray if it is heavily soiled. Litter trays should be cleaned out completely at least weekly and topped up with fresh litter daily once the solids and clumps are removed. If the litter is a non-clumping variety it should be changed every couple of days (solids removed daily) since the build-up of odour from the urine passed can become extremely unpleasant for the cat.

Put off by the smell of the litter. Using scented litter, deodorants or disinfectants with strong smells may put the scent-sensitive cat off using the tray. To avoid this problem use a mild detergent and hot water or disinfectant specifically recommended for tray cleaning and rinse the tray thoroughly before use. Avoid disinfectants that turn cloudy in water as these usually contain phenols which are toxic to cats. Cats learning to use the tray initially may need to establish it as an appropriate toilet site and too frequent cleaning may weaken the association. Any litter used should be non-scented if this is established to be the problem.

Using polythene litter liners. These can occasionally catch in a cat's claws as it scratches and cause litter to spray upwards; if they are used, it may be worth experimenting with no liner to see if the problem resolves.

Wrong type of litter. Changing the consistency or type of litter may put the cat off using it. Hardwood-based pellets may have been acceptable as a kitten but as cats get heavier there are some that object to walking on the uncomfortable surface. Cats tend to prefer fine grain litter with the consistency of sand with no scented deodoriser. If you want to change the type you use, mix the new one in gradually over a week to gauge the cat's reaction or place a new tray with the new substrate alongside and allow the cat to choose.

Position of the litter tray. If the tray is positioned in the open where the dog, children or other cats disturb it, the cat may feel too vulnerable to use it. Instead it may seek a more secure spot behind the television, for example. Cats may not like to use a tray if it is next to a noisy washing machine or tumble dryer. Place the tray in a quiet corner where the cat only has to watch in one or two directions at once rather than in the open or in a thoroughfare. Placing food near the tray will put the cat off using it, so place feeding bowls elsewhere.

Type of litter tray. Some cats prefer the security of a covered tray while others prefer an open tray as it offers more options for escape. If you normally use an open tray it may be worth purchasing one with a lid or vice versa. An inverted box with one side cut out or careful positioning of house plants may provide the necessary privacy. Some covered trays have flaps over the entrance and these can be one obstacle too many for the more insecure cat.

Bad associations. Occasionally a cat decides not to use a tray because it has had a bad experience there. Giving medication or touching a cat while it is using the tray may be sufficient to create a bad association. Repositioning the tray to a quiet spot may help.

Early training. Kittens will often soil in the house when they are young if they are given immediate access to large areas. When kittens first arrive in their new home they are only weeks away from their original litter training by their mother. Their bladder and bowel control are not as developed as an adult's so it is important that the young kitten has easy access to the litter tray at all times. It is advisable to confine the kitten to one room initially, with increasing periods of time to explore other areas after a few weeks. Every time the kitten uses the tray it is establishing an entrenched behaviour that will be maintained throughout its life.

Illness. Urinary tract disease or diarrhoea can cause soiling as the cat is either in discomfort or just can't make it in time to the litter tray or outside. A cat that has started to urinate inappropriately in the house should be taken to the vet for a check-up, particularly if you notice your cat straining unproductively and/or passing small amounts of urine frequently. A form of urinary tract disease that is stress-related (often referred to as [Feline Idiopathic Cystitis](#)) is less obvious in its presentation but one common symptom is urinating outside the litter tray. Any urinary tract discomfort can make the cat urinate when standing rather than attempting to go outside or to the litter tray. Urination in this way can sometimes be confused with spraying. Cats often benefit from increased fluid intake if they suffer from recurrent cystitis. This may require your cat to change from a dry diet to a wet one but your veterinarian should be consulted regarding any dietary management. Any illness or pain can be associated with soiling so an early examination by your veterinarian will be necessary. If successfully treated your cat will return to its normal acceptable pattern of toileting. Occasionally cats will continue to soil if they have experienced discomfort on the original tray so it may be necessary to provide an additional tray elsewhere to encourage use.

Old age: An older cat may not want to venture out in bad weather or it may be having problems using the cat flap because of stiff joints. As a cat gets older it becomes more insecure and it may feel threatened by the presence of other cats in the territory. It is almost inevitable that, at some stage, elderly cats will require safe and accessible toilet facilities indoors. The provision of an indoor litter tray often resolves this problem. It is always important to rule out medical causes for soiling in the elderly cat so a trip to your veterinarian may be necessary.

Fear or anxiety. Cats are at their most vulnerable to attack when they are urinating or defecating outside and, if they feel threatened, it may deter them from doing so. Other cats are usually the biggest problem but it could be a neighbour's dog or even a sudden loud noise. The provision of a discreet litter tray indoors will take away the feelings of anxiety and the need for the cat to make a conscious decision to find a suitable toilet site. Accompanying the cat on visits to the garden may encourage it to eliminate outside again. Your cat may normally have chosen to toilet well away from its home so it may be beneficial to make its own garden more appealing. Create an area in a quiet corner relatively close to the house (for ease of escape back indoors) and mix in with the earth a high proportion of peat-free soil or sand.

Removal of a previously used latrine site. Some cats are creatures of habit in their choice of elimination sites and redesigning a garden can have a serious impact on their behaviour. Always ensure that changes to the garden incorporate an area that can be comfortably used by your cat as a latrine (well dug over earth). If you are aware of your cat's favoured site then preserving it in some way would be ideal.

Presence of strangers. Occasionally a cat will urinate or defecate indoors if strangers are in the home and access to the litter tray or outdoors would require the cat to pass through the same room as the visitor. Some cats suffer from 'home alone' anxieties when their owners go away and leave them to defend the house by themselves. The presence of a stranger caring for them can cause some cats to feel intensely threatened and subsequently 'mark' an area, particularly the owner's bed, which has a strong, familiar and reassuring scent. If your cat is particularly nervous of strangers, especially young children, it may be beneficial to provide an indoor litter facility in the room where the cat seeks refuge just in case it gets 'caught short'! The best way to avoid 'home alone' soiling is to keep the bedroom door shut and try to get familiar people to care for your cat in your absence. Some cats are particularly prone to the stress of being left behind and they actually benefit from a visit to a reputable and caring boarding cattery