



Some tips to solve litter box or inappropriate urination issues

Litter box or inappropriate urination problems can be disheartening for any cat owner. All cats know how to use a litter box (it is instinctual) and generally do not stop using the litter box to retaliate against you or to take revenge.

There are some things you can do to determine why your cat is urinating outside the litter box and to correct the behavior.

Once this behavior starts, we know that we only have a small window of time to get it turned around (about 1 month), or the cat will now habitually mark—maybe the rest of its life. This issue is common and very frustrating, but we really need our cat lovers to try everything in their home to keep their cat or rehome the cat themselves because the rate of success in the shelter is very low.

We urge you to try one or more of these suggestions before giving up on your cat. When a cat comes to a shelter because he/she is not using the litter box correctly, the label of “inappropriate urination” or “litter box problems” sticks and makes it extremely hard for a new family to even consider adopting the cat. Many of these cats are lovely creatures who languish in a shelter for a long time.

Please, before you consider relinquishing your pet to a shelter, try these suggestions:

- **Call your veterinarian right away** and schedule an appointment to make sure there is no medical reason your cat may be peeing outside the litter box. Often when it is difficult or painful to urinate, cats will be unable to make it to the box and find another place.

- **Ask your veterinarian** if an anti-anxiety drug like Prozac or Clompiramine would help.

- **Have there been any changes in your routine or life recently?** Cats are creatures of habit and sometimes urinate inappropriately when anxious due to a change. Use some of the tips below to redirect your cat's anxiety.

- **Try Feli-way** to calm your cat. <http://www.feliway.com/us/Frequently-Asked-Questions>

- Perhaps you need to **put another litter box somewhere in the house**, close to where your cat may be urinating. The general rule of thumb is to have one litter box per cat and then an extra. This may sound silly but it can be absolutely true. Your cat may not want to or be able to walk down to that end of the house when he/she really needs to go.

- Cats like to dig so a **deeper or larger litter box** may be in order. And don't skimp on the amount of litter in the box.



The logo features the word "cat" in a stylized, lowercase font. The letter "c" is replaced by a silhouette of a cat's head and neck, facing left. The word "cat" is positioned above a horizontal line. Below the line, the words "cat adoption team" are written in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font.

cat adoption team

- **There maybe something or someone who prevents your cat from making it to the litter box every time.** Sometimes another cat or pet or even a playful child can prevent your cat from reaching the litter box. This is another reason to have more than one box.
- **The litter box(s) may not be as clean as your cat likes.** Some cats are extremely fastidious about their litter box and refuse to use a soiled one. Cleaning the litter box daily may be just the solution. Some cats will not use the litter box after they poop in it and some want one box for poop and another for pee.
- **Is your cat declawed?** Often the rough texture of even scoopable litter will hurt the paws of a declawed cat. This will make it so your cat would not want to the litter box since it is just too painful. Try putting a pee pad (you'll need to look in the dog or puppy section of your local pet supply store) in a litter box. You may also want to offer a litter box with torn up newspaper. We recommend hand tearing into strips and using newspaper rather than shredded paper since the newsprint will better absorb urine. It may cause you more trouble in litter box cleaning; however, isn't that better than having your cat pee outside the box?
- **Have you changed the brand of litter you use?** Some cats are very particular about the litter in their litter box. You may need to go back to that previous brand or try a few to find just the right one. For cats used to going outside, try dirt. Seriously, if that is what your cat was used to using, it may be worth vacuuming a few more times to prevent these accidents. You can slowly convert your cat to a soft clumping litter with time.
- Perhaps you can try a litter additive called **Cat Attract** - contains a scent that naturally attracts kittens and cats to use the litter box. <http://www.preciouscat.com/attract-litter-additiveonly-available-through-your-p-7.html>
- Your placement of the litter box is not where your cat really wants or needs it to be. **Try moving the box** closer to where the accidents occur until the behavior is resolved. Or move the box to a quiet location away from all the commotion.
- Maybe your cat really likes a **litter box without a top** – take it off and see. Or perhaps he wants/need a larger box. You can use mid-sized totes as litter boxes as well. We've been told a 66 qt clear tub works. Clear so one cat can see the other – preventing kitties from sneaking up on the one in the privy.
- A large tote/tub can also be used if your cat seems to always eliminate right outside the door to a covered box. They also keep the litter inside if you have a digger.
- While we generally advise to keep your cat's food and water far away from the litter box (who wants to eat or drink next to their own toilet), **sometimes putting food bowls right on the spots** where your cat is urinating will move him/her to use the litter box. If your cat is peeing just outside of or next to the box, put the food bowls next to the box for a while.



- **Clean all urine accidents** thoroughly with an enzyme cleaner (Urine Off, Nature's Miracle, to name a couple). This removes the smell. Your cat may be continuing to urinate in an area because it smells like pee.

Please check out tips sheets on this web page: <http://catadoptionteam.org/programs-resources/cat-care-behavior/#behavior>

Thank you for reading and considering these suggestions to help your cat resolve this behavior issue.

Please call or email CAT if you have further questions or need other resources.
(updated July 1, 2011)