



LITTER BOX AVOIDANCE

There are many reasons a cat may go to the bathroom in inappropriate places. Many times, litter box avoidance is your cats way of saying that something is not right. Following the guidelines below should help you narrow down the causes and reestablish proper litter box use in your home.

FIRST:

- 🐾 The first thing you should do is call your veterinarian. A number of medical conditions can cause inappropriate elimination. Once your vet has ruled out a medical cause, consider the following:

Litter box location:

- 🐾 Cats prefer the litter box to be somewhere quiet, and away from heavy foot traffic.
 - Place your litter box a good distance from the main living space and heavily trafficked areas of the home. This could be in a spare bedroom, bathroom, or even the basement.
- 🐾 Some cats, especially those who are overweight, older, or have joint or claw discomfort, may not be motivated to travel far for their box.
 - The shorter the distance to the boxes, the better chances your cat will use them.
 - Consider putting, at least, one litter box on each floor of your home.

Box cleanliness:

- 🐾 A cat's sense of smell is very strong, and their need for a clean bathroom is, too.
 - Twice daily, scoop all boxes.
 - At least once a week, completely empty your litter box and provide fresh litter.
 - At least once a month, clean and disinfect the box to remove any lingering residue.
 - Yearly or bi-yearly, your boxes should be replaced. By this time, they are likely very scratched up inside and holding onto odors that may be offensive to your cat.

Number of boxes:

- 🐾 As a general rule, there should be one box **per** cat in the home, plus one **extra**.
 - Having the proper number of boxes can prevent any fighting over the litter box.
 - Even with one cat, sometimes there is a preference of using separate boxes for stool and urine.

Type of litter:

- 🐾 Some cats have a texture or scent preferences when it comes to litter.
 - Most cats seem to like fine, clay litter the best. However, be cautious of scented litters as they may deter your cat from using the box.
 - Box liners can cause an unpleasant feeling to a cat and should be avoided when possible.

Type of box:

- 🐾 When choosing your litter box, consider the size/age of your cat.
 - Not all cats will climb over a large lip or through a swinging door to get into a litter box.
 - With kittens, remember that they will need a smaller box to start and a larger one as they grow.

Stress:

- 🐾 Some cats do not accept change very well, and when something upsets their daily routine, they may avoid using the litter box.
- 🐾 Owners sometimes see this behavior when introducing a new baby or pet into the home. Cats can express their disinterest in the new family member by using their items as a place for elimination.
 - If you notice this problem, you can start by encouraging your cat and the new family member to interact in a positive way. For example, start feeding a high-value food (such as tuna) only in the presence of the new family member.
 - Give your cat a space for alone time. This could be a tall cat tower, a separate room, or even just a favorite lounge place that is "off limits" to the new family member.
 - Do introductions as slowly as possible. If adding a new pet, try to keep your cat separated for at least two weeks. **See our Multi-Cat Households handout for more information.*
 - If a new baby is being brought home, always introduce smells first. Do not force your cat to interact with the baby. Keep the baby's room off limits to the cat.

***Note that urination on a vertical surface is "spraying," not litter box avoidance, and will need a different course of action.**