

## INAPPROPRIATE TOILETING

This is one of the most common complaints owners have about their cat, yet it is a problem that is often misunderstood. Many owners, having found an unwelcome “gift” in their shoes or a soggy patch on the carpet behind the sofa, believe their cat is being lazy, or spiteful. The truth of the matter is, neither is the case.

Your cat may have a genuine medical condition that is causing them to eliminate so suddenly they cannot possibly reach an appropriate toilet spot in time. You should take your cat to the vet to rule this out as a potential cause.

If the vet declares your cat medically sound, then the other option is that the elimination has a behavioural cause; usually stress. Cats are very sensitive creatures that love routine and can be upset by some very obscure things. Anything from moving house or a new baby, to a new aftershave or a territorial neighbourhood cat can all cause stress. Ask yourself when the problem started, and if anything - no matter how subtle - changed or was introduced to your home or neighbourhood around that time.

Some toileting behaviour is completely misunderstood, with the owner thinking their cat is a “dirty” creature, when in fact the problem is that the cat is fastidiously clean. These cats may not use a litter tray if the litter it contains has been soiled even once. Instead, they will seek out a toilet they consider “clean” such as your nice clean doona cover. With these cats, the problem is usually overcome by offering multiple litter trays in various places and scooping or cleaning them at least twice a day.

### Solving the Problem

Regardless of the reason your cat is eliminating in areas that are inappropriate, there are some things that you can do that will probably be very effective in re-establishing good toilet behaviour in your cat.

The first rule of cat toileting is that they must always have access to a litter tray, even if they are outdoor cats. Cats feel most vulnerable when they are toileting, so if there is a scary cat or creature around that makes them feel insecure, they will often hide to toilet. This is why inside cupboards, under beds and behind furniture are such common targets for this behaviour.



The second rule is that cats must always have one litter tray each, plus one. So if you have one cat, you should have two trays. If you have two cats, you should have three trays and so on. Try not to position the trays in open areas or beside glass doors or windows. This will make the cat feel even more vulnerable when it goes to the toilet. Instead, try placing them in easy to clean but cosy corners, where the cat can have more than one access point (vital for a quick escape if they feel threatened).

The third rule is that not every cat will like every type of litter beneath their toes when they go to the toilet. If they don't like the litter, they won't use the tray. Try changing the type of litter you use. Many cats prefer a sandy substrate (ask any builder!) and simply changing the litter may be enough to solve many toileting issues.

### **What Else Can You Do?**

Clean all affected areas thoroughly, but be careful not to use ammonia based cleaning products as these may actually encourage the behaviour rather than deter it. Soiled carpet may need to be removed (at least in part) and replaced to be effective.

Change your litter cleaning routine - make sure trays are cleaned at least once a day.

Litter trays should always be roomy enough for the cat to move about in easily, or they may miss the tray accidentally.

Remember that the litter tray must be more convenient for your cat than for you. If you provide litter facilities that are very convenient for you, but the cat doesn't like them, you will just be ultimately creating more work for yourself since the cat won't use it. In the long run, it will save you time and unnecessary stress if you provide a litter tray you cat feels comfortable using, even if it means it is not quite as convenient for you.

If your cat has a cat flap, make sure it is one that has a magnetic "key" or allows access only to an enclosed area so your cat doesn't have to worry about intruders. Even better, do away with the cat flap entirely and become your cat's doorman. If the problem is another cat lurking around outside, your cat will soon feel braver once they realise that if anyone wants to come into their home, they have to ask Mum or Dad first!!

If there are accidents, remain calm and don't reprimand your cat. If the cat senses you are angry, it is unlikely to relate your frustration with the act of toileting, and therefore will become even more stressed and confused. This will only make the problem worse.

Your relationship with your cat is vital to ensuring a stress free life for both of you, so try to understand things from your cat's point of view and you may find you will begin to feel less frustrated and more sympathetic to their plight. Believe it or not, once you feel calmer, your cat will feel calmer too, and this will help reduce their stress levels and therefore their problem eliminating.

