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## **Inappropriate Elimination, Overview**

House-training problems - called inappropriate elimination - are the number one cause of behavior-related complaints from cat lovers - and with good reason. No one likes to deal with urine and feces in a litter box, much less in a part of the house you didn't expect to find them. Cats who can't be convinced to use the litter box all too often end up looking for a new home - and for these animals, the prognosis is grim.

Fortunately, most cases of inappropriate elimination can be solved if you're determined to look at things from your cat's point of view, make a few adjustments, and stay patient.

Although you still need to fix the underlying problems of why your cat isn't going where he should, some medications may help in the short-run. Talk to your veterinarian.

## **Litter- box avoidance**

The first step in getting your cat to use the litter box is to figure out why he's not using it. The first step is always to rule out a medical problem - commonly, a urinary- tract infection. These infections give the cat a "sense of urgency" to urinate even when the bladder is not full; and urinating may even be downright painful in more severe cases. Your cat may come to associate the use of the box with these unpleasant sensations, and so avoids the box. If that's the case, you need to retrain your cat, perhaps by changing the box and litter so it "feels" different, but probably by using the safe room approach. (More on that in this section.)

If your cat checks out fine, you need to experiment to make sure that everything about the box is to his liking. The following list describes some things to consider:

\* **Cleanliness.** Cats are fastidious animals, and if the litter box is dirty, they look elsewhere for a place to go. Think of how you felt the last time you were faced with a dirty public restroom and you can probably empathize! Clean the box frequently - twice a day is ideal - and make sure that it's completely scrubbed clean and aired out on a weekly basis. Another option: Two litter boxes.

\* **Box type and filler.** Many choices people make to suit their own tastes don't match with what their cat wants, and when you're talking boxes and litter, your cat's opinion is the only one that really counts. Many times the offending box or litter is one chosen in an attempt to reduce smell for people - but your cat can still smell just fine. A covered box may seem more pleasing to you,

but your cat may think it's pretty rank inside. Likewise, scented litters may make you think the box smells fine, but your cat may disagree - not only is the box dirty, he reasons, but it's got this extra "clean" odor he can't abide. Go back to basics: a simple box, a plain litter. Many cats prefer clumping litter, and this variety makes the box easier to keep clean, too. Just skip the deodorizers.

\* **Location.** Your cat's box should be away from his food and water dishes (you don't eat near the toilet, so why should your cat?) and in a place where he can get to easily and feel safe in. Consider location from a cat's point of view: Choose a quiet spot where he can see what's coming at him. A cat doesn't want any surprises while he's in the box. You should also experiment with additional boxes in your house, especially if you've got more than one cat. Urine and feces are weapons in a war over territory: Some cats share boxes; many don't.

Make the area where your cat has had mistakes less attractive by cleaning thoroughly with a pet-odor neutralizer (available in pet-supply stores or catalogs) and covering with foil, plastic sheeting, or plastic carpet runners with the points up to discourage reuse of the area. Enzymatic pet-mess cleaners take time to work, so figure on keeping the area blocked off for at least a couple of weeks.

If this procedure doesn't clear up the problem, you may need to retrain your cat by keeping him in a small area for a few days. Make sure that the safe room has no good options besides the litter box - no carpet, no pile of dirty laundry. Block off the bathtub - keep an inch of water in it, to discourage its use as a place to go. After your cat is reliably using the litter box, let him slowly expand his territory again. As long as you keep up your end of the bargain and keep the litter box appealing, he should keep his up, too.