

House-Soiling 101

What Every Cat Caregiver Needs to Know

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House-soiling is a common concern among cat caregivers, but it is important to remember that cats do not urinate or defecate outside the litterbox out of spite. There are many potential reasons for this behavior, including medical, behavioral, and environmental factors.

Setting Cats Up for Success

Meeting your cat's physical, social, and emotional needs from the start helps prevent and is a foundation in resolving house-soiling.



ABC's of Litterboxes

Accessibility & Placement

- Ensure litterboxes are easy for all cats in the home to access.
- Have plenty of litterboxes; a good rule is that the minimum # of litterboxes = # of cats +1 (2 cats = 3 boxes) *Keep in mind, 3 litterboxes right next to each other is one box from a cat's perspective.
- Place litterboxes throughout the home including all levels of a multilevel home
 - Many cats prefer to defecate in one box and urinate in another
 - If a cat, dog, or human is blocking the pathway (purposefully or accidentally) the cats should have another option available.
 - Older cats and cats with medical issues that cause them to go the bathroom frequently require easy access to a litterbox

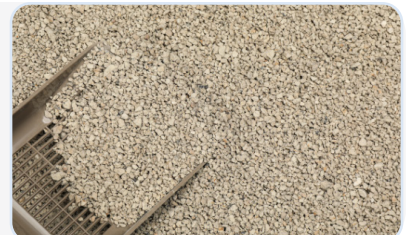


Box Size & Type

- Boxes should be **1.5 times the length** of your cat to allow comfortable movement.
- Most commercial litterboxes are too small—consider using:
 - Large plastic storage bins with a low-entry cutout.
 - Under-the-bed storage boxes.
 - Cement mixing tubs, which provide space and easy access.
- In multi-cat households, transparent bins allow cats to see their surroundings, reducing anxiety.
- **Uncovered** boxes are recommended. Covered boxes are typically not large enough, can trap in scent, and are seen as “ambush areas” that limit a cat's visual field and escape potential.

Cleanliness & Litter Type

- Scoop litter at least **once per day**.
- Wash litterboxes with mild soap every **4-6 weeks** (avoid bleach or strong chemicals).
- Most cats prefer **clumping, unscented, low-dust clay litter**.
- Offer a choice—if your cat shows a preference for a certain litter, stick with it.



Managing the Environment: The Five Pillars of a Healthy Feline Home

1. Provide multiple safe places including vertical, hiding, and warm spaces.
2. Provide multiple and separated key environmental resources including food, water, litterboxes, resting areas, and areas to scratch. Your cat loves you so it's important to place multiple resources throughout the home including the areas your family is in the most
3. Encourage play and predatory behaviors with interactive toys, puzzle feeders, and other enrichment.
4. Foster positive, predictable human-cat and inter-pet interactions based on your cat's comfort level.
5. Maintain an environment that respects your cat's sense of smell, avoiding strong artificial scents including litter additives and clean soiled areas with an enzymatic cleaner



Recognizing and Respecting Your Cat's Body Language

Cats communicate with us with body language. By understanding and recognizing their body language, you can detect signs of stress and potential health issues sooner. Pay close attention to your cat and minimize stressors by adjusting their environment to support their overall well-being.

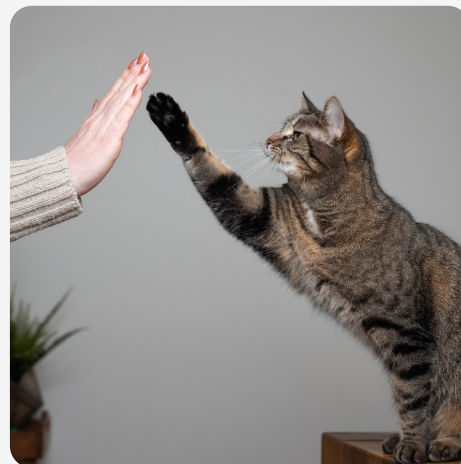


Do Not Punish Your Cat

Punishment increases anxiety and does not address the underlying cause. Instead, focus on understanding why your cat is avoiding the litterbox.

If your cat is avoiding the litterbox, they are trying to tell you something! There is always a reason behind changes in litterbox behavior. By addressing medical concerns, optimizing the litterbox setup, and ensuring your cat's overall well-being, you can help your cat feel safe and comfortable in their home.

If you're struggling with litterbox issues, we're here to help! Please consult with a veterinarian and a cat behavior professional, such as a Veterinary Technician Specialist (VTS) in behavior, a certified cat behavior consultant, or a veterinary behaviorist, for advice tailored to your cat's specific needs.



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