



## How To Prevent Litter Box Problems

Under normal conditions, your cat will like to use her litter box. Changes in your cat's litter box behavior can almost always be traced to a medical condition, stress, or something she dislikes about her litter box environment. Fortunately, a little know-how and preventive maintenance can greatly reduce the chance of litter box problems.

### But First...

- ❖ Never punish or yell at your cat for not using her litter box; that only makes things worse.
- ❖ Any acute or prolonged signs of litter box difficulties, such as urinating more frequently, avoiding the litter box, or **straining**, could indicate an **urgent** medical condition; call your vet right away.

### The Perfect Litter Box Environment

- ❖ **Location.** Put the litter box in a pleasant location: easy to access, away from noisy or high-traffic areas, out of the dog's and baby's reach. Some cats, especially older or handicapped cats, prefer a litter box on each floor of the house. Beware of putting the litter box directly on soft carpet; for some cats, the adjacent carpet feels like litter. Use a minimum of one litter box per cat.
- ❖ **Litter.** Every cat has a favorite litter – work with your cat to find out her preference. When in doubt, start with an unscented clumping litter. Although the jury's still out on this, if you have a kitten, you may want to avoid clumping litters that contain sodium bentonite. Keep kitty's box filled with about two inches of litter, unless directed otherwise by the package. When changing litters, do it gradually over several days, or fill a second box with the new litter.
- ❖ **Type of box.** Some cats don't care for covered litter boxes. If you use a covered box, remember to scoop and clean often, as odors can be trapped inside. Some cat owners like automatic-cleaning litter boxes, others don't. As with litter, your cat will help guide you in your selection.
- ❖ **Clean!** Scoop clumping litter at least once a day, other litters as directed. Wash the litter box and replace the litter weekly. Use a mild soap and rinse well. An occasional 1-part-in-10 bleach solution is fine if you rinse thoroughly. Stay away from ammonia and citrus-scented or strong-smelling cleaners.
- ❖ **Routine.** Once you and kitty find a system that you're both comfortable with, "stay the course."

### Minimize Stress

Play with your cat each day. Make sure she has some convenient scratching posts that she *uses*. Let her sleep undisturbed in a comfy place. Give her some nice views, fun cardboard boxes to explore, a cat tree (or reasonable facsimile) to climb, and a small family of partially hidden catnip mice to discover – accommodate her natural curiosity *safely*. Strive for a harmonious household. Tell your cat what a great kitty she is, and give her affection each day – but don't invade her space when she prefers to be left alone.

Cats derive comfort from a predictable routine; if major changes such as a move or a new baby are inevitable, gently and gradually acclimate kitty, and maintain her routine as much as possible.

### Monitor Kitty's Litter Box Habits

Get to know your cat's eating, drinking, and bathroom habits, and be alert to any changes. When you scoop, do a onceover on the litter box contents. Occasionally watch kitty in the act, as long as you don't bother her. The urine amount emptied should be more than tiny; stools should be brown, not immediately hard, and not runny. Your cat should seem comfortable when using her litter box and digging in the litter. There is some room for natural variation in these behaviors – when in doubt, call your vet.

### Special Cases

- ❖ **Kittens** should be introduced to the litter box early. If your kitten goes outside the box, wipe up the waste with a paper towel, put the towel in the box, and help kitty cover up – she'll catch on.
- ❖ **Declawed cats** might be more reluctant to dig in the litter, and may require a lighter litter.
- ❖ **Older, handicapped, and injured cats** will appreciate more and shallower litter boxes.

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