

How to Handle House-soiling from your Cat

When your cat is not using the litter box, it is less than ideal. Luckily, there are some easy solutions in dealing with it!

Why is my cat doing that?

Cats cannot speak our language; they use their body language and bodily eliminations to communicate instead. Cats really like their litter boxes. When a cat is not using the litterbox, that is their way of telling you that something is not right and they need your help! Determining what is not right can be challenging, as there are many reasons to take into consideration including medical, litter box set up, or even stress.

What can I do?

Visit your vet

- Medical causes, such as blockages or urinary tract infections, are common reasons cats stop using the litterbox. If your cat is suddenly not using their box, see your vet first!

Prevention

- Keep your cat in an enclosed room when you first bring them home to help them get used to their surroundings. Too much space too soon can be overwhelming to a cat. As they gain confidence and are using their litter box continuously, open up more areas and give access to more litter boxes.

Clean the area appropriately

- Use an enzymatic cleaner on the soiled location after removing as much of the waste as possible. Enzymatic cleaners release cultures that actually eat the urine.
 - Cats have a stronger sense of smell than us, so even if you can't smell any leftover urine, your cat might—making it more likely to soil that area again. This is why using a deodorizer alone will likely not help.

Increase the number of litter boxes

- Many cat behaviorists recommend having 1 additional litter box to the number of cats in a household.
 - Ex. If you have 2 cats, 3 litter boxes are recommended
- Avoid placing multiple litterboxes right next to each other. In the cat's eyes, this is just one big litterbox. Place multiple litterboxes in various areas in the home.

Keep the box clean

- Like humans, cats prefer clean and pristine bathroom areas. It's a good habit to clean your litter box once daily, maybe even twice daily depending on your cat's preference.
 - Don't forget to do a thorough deep cleaning of the entire box every now and again too.

Location, Location, Location

- Consider the locations of bathrooms that you prefer to use. Are they in a busy area with lots of foot traffic? Or are they in an area that's nice and quiet?





- Cats prefer privacy and calm when using the bathroom. Ensure their litter box is placed in an area of the home with limited foot traffic, but is also easy for the cat to access.
- Multiple floor household? Ensure your cat has a litter box on each floor for convenience.
- Did you move the litterbox? Cats like consistency and routine. Try to keep your cat's litterbox in the same place. Wouldn't you be confused if the bathroom in your home suddenly changed locations?
 - If you need to move the box, do it gradually so your cat can more easily adapt.

Look at the types of litter box and litter

- Large and open litter boxes are the most preferable. Ensure your cat has enough room to stand up and turn around in the box comfortably.
 - Fancy, self-cleaning boxes can be strange looking and make noises that may scare your cat.
 - Covered boxes only give your cat one exit point, which can make your cat feel trapped and vulnerable, causing them to avoid it.
- Cats typically prefer litter that is most resembling of dirt or sand. However, some cats may have developed a different preference at a young age such as shredded newspaper or pellets.
 - Lay out multiple boxes next to each other (this is ok to conduct a litter preference test, but not for long term use) each with a different litter. Then you can see which litter your cat uses the most often.
 - Is your litter scented? While pleasing to humans, some cats may find the smell of scented litters offensive. It is best to choose a non-scented litter.
 - Is your cat declawed? Does your cat have long fur on their paws? Sometimes clay litters can be painful to declawed or long-haired cats as the litter bits get stuck in their paws or makes their fur matted. Try a pelleted litter for these cats.



When do I get professional help?

There are numerous reasons why your cat may not be using the litter box outside of the suggestions mentioned including stress.

Please reach out to Mountain Humane's Behavior Department for step-by-step guidance and advice if your cat is not using the litter box appropriately at Behavior@mountainhumane.org or by phone at (208) 788-4351 x114.