



Changing Lives by Connecting Pets and People

House-soiling FAQ

What is house-soiling?

House soiling is a term that is used when cats are not using the litterbox. This inappropriate elimination can be urine or stool. When cats stop using the litter box, it's their way of telling you that something is not right.

What's the difference between marking & house-soiling?

Technically urine marking or spraying can be classified as house-soiling. However, a cat is typically marking/spraying for different reasons that it will be house-soiling. Cats are territorial. They take comfort in knowing their territory. Urine marking is most often a territorial behavior to inform other animals of a cat's territory or to make a cat feel more comfortable in their area, especially if they just moved in or there are other animals around.

How do I know if my cat is spraying or house-soiling?

Urine spraying is often done on vertical surfaces (such as a wall, or couch, etc.) while house-soiling will often occur on horizontal surfaces (such as the floor, a pile of clothes, etc.). Urine spraying is often done in small amounts vs a large puddle. Your cat will often continue to use their litterbox for urine and stool if they are spraying. Marking is most commonly done with urine, but on rare occasions may also be done with stool. Urine spray has a unique smell that differs from regular urine.

Can female cats urine mark or spray?

Yes. While urine marking is most commonly seen in unneutered males. Females may also urine mark. Urine marking is most commonly resolved through spaying &/or neutering your cat.

What do I do if my cat is not using the litterbox?

First, take the cat to your vet. Underlying medical concerns are a common reason for a cat to not use the litterbox. Many cases these medical concerns can be potentially fatal if left untreated such as a blockage.

What are common medical concerns that may cause house-soiling?

Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs), urinary crystals, bladder stones and/or bladder infections are common reasons for a cat to stop using the litter box. Sometimes arthritic cats are unable to climb into a litter box. Constipation may be another cause. Only a veterinarian professional can diagnose these conditions and others, so it is important to take your cat to the vet if house-soiling occurs.

My vet says it's not medical, now what?

There are numerous reasons why your cat may not be using the litter box. It's best to reach out to Mountain Humane's Behavior team (behavior@mountainhumane.org or (208) 788-4351 x114) so they can help guide you in determining the reason. Reasons vary from inappropriate litter box set ups, to other animals, to stress in a new environment, to just having specific preferences. Mountain Humane's Behavior Team is trained to be able to try and identify causes and gives tips on how to help.

True or False? My cat is doing this to spite me?

False! In order for your cat to house-soil to spite you, they have to understand that you think urine/feces is annoying and/or gross. This is too complex a thought for your cat to have. Your cat may be in pain or is trying to communicate with you. It's important that you NEVER punish your cat for having accidents due to this fact.