



**Veterinary House Calls**  
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*Master*

## BEHAVIORAL SCREEN FOR CATS WITH INAPPROPRIATE URINATION

All cats that are urinating outside the litter box or in inappropriate places should receive a medical evaluation to identify and address underlying medical diseases. In some cases, a primary medical reason for inappropriate urination will be identified, treatment implemented, and the problem resolved. However, in other cases, there will be no primary medical problem identified or even after resolution/control of the medical issue, inappropriate urination will continue. In the latter case, the medical problem may have been the initiating cause but behavioral issues maintain inappropriate urination, despite the successful control/resolution of medical problems. In such cats, consider the following questions.

Question	Answer
1. Does your cat urinate on vertical surfaces outside the litter box?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
2. Does your cat urinate on horizontal surfaces outside the litter box?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
3. Does your cat seek out certain targets for urination?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
4. Do these targets have a common quality (eg, all soft, absorbent materials, certain room, always slick surfaces)?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
5. Is the deposited quantity of urine very small?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
6. Does your cat defecate outside the litter box?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
7. Does your cat ever use the litter box?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
8. Does your cat dig in its litter when it uses the litter box?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
9. Is there more than one cat in the household?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
10. Does your cat ever fight or appear frightened by other pets or people in the household?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
11. Are the litter boxes all in the same site/room/area/level of the house?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO

\*\*"YES" answers for questions 1 and 5 may indicate urine marking.

Total Number of Boxes in House	Answer
	Indicate number of boxes with each characteristic:
<b>Box style</b>	
Covered	
Uncovered	
Large	
Medium	
Small	
With plastic liner	
<b>Litter type</b>	
Unscented	
Scented	
Clumping (sand-like)	
Recycled paper (pellets)	
Crystal (silica)	
Nonclumping clay	
Wheat, clumping	
Corn, clumping	
Pine	
Other	
<b>Cleaning schedule for litter boxes</b>	Check rate
<b>Scooping</b>	
Multiple times per day	<input type="checkbox"/>
Once per day	<input type="checkbox"/>
Once every other day	<input type="checkbox"/>
Twice a week	<input type="checkbox"/>
Once a week or less	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Complete box change (wash, new litter)</b>	
Daily	<input type="checkbox"/>
Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Every 2 weeks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Every 2 to 3 months	<input type="checkbox"/>
Every 3 to 6 months	<input type="checkbox"/>
Every year or more	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

## BEHAVIORAL MANAGEMENT FOR CATS WITH INAPPROPRIATE URINATION

Cats that urinate and/or defecate outside the litter box do so for a variety of reasons including medical disease, communication (eg, marking), and toileting preferences/aversions. Sometimes the medical problem can be an initiating factor for toileting problems. For example, medically triggered urgency to urinate causes the cat to select a convenient location like the bed on which it sleeps. Even with resolution of the medical problem, the new behavior can persist. These cats develop a new preference for toileting. (eg, the bed is convenient, nicely absorbent, and is cleaned readily) or have such negative associations with the litter box (eg, painful urination when they were ill) that they persist in using a new, alternative, inappropriate site. Issues that should be addressed in cases of inappropriate elimination are listed below.

Resource	Recommendation	Explanation/Consequences
Number of litter boxes	Number of litter boxes = number of cats +1	Too few litter boxes may result in problems that cause a cat to seek alternative toileting sites. These problems may include: volume of excrement in litter box, box occupied by another cat, litter box being guarded by another cat.
Location of litter boxes	Should be spread throughout environment in easily accessible locations	Clustering litter boxes in one location may create access problems. These problems may include: guarding by another cat and physical challenges (eg, stairs/distance) with getting to litter box location.
Litter box style	Large Uncovered	Boxes that are too small may be uncomfortable for the cat to use, causing it to seek other sites. Boxes that are covered may trap odors, creating an unpleasant environment and causing the cat to seek other toileting sites.
Litter	Clumping (sand-like) Unscented	While individual preferences exist, the majority of cats prefer unscented clumping litter (fine particulate matter – similar to sand).
Litter box hygiene	Daily litter box scooping Complete litter box cleaning/change every 1 to 4 weeks	Cats tend to be fastidious and prefer clean toileting locations. Frequency of full box cleaning (wash/new litter) will depend upon litter type; clumping-type litters that allow owners to remove urine may require less frequent changes.
Scratching posts/pads	Multiple, sturdy, tall, prominently located	Scratching is a form of marking behavior. Encouraging scratch marking on appropriate targets may reduce likelihood of other forms of marking and prevent destruction of household items.
Resting perches	Multiple, single-cat sized, elevated, upholstered	Creative use of vertical space in the home can reduce intercat tension/aggression. Cats tend to prefer upholstered surfaces to slick surfaces for resting but individual preferences may exist.
Feeding/water stations	Number of stations = number of cats	Providing adequate resources spread throughout the environment allows cats to self-segregate, which may help reduce social tension in multicat households.
Play/social interaction	At least 2 to 3 short sessions (5 to 10 minutes daily)	Cat age and personality may affect type and duration of interaction but it is important to recognize that domesticated cats are social and will often benefit from play/interaction. Indoor-only cats can especially benefit from owner-initiated activity such as play with toys for overall stress reduction and exercise. Play activity also enhances the family-pet bond and is beneficial for overweight cats.