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# Cat Litter Box Blues

## General Information

Elimination disorder, or a cat not using a litter box for urinating and defecating, is the most common cat behavioral problem. Some studies show nearly 40 to 75 percent of cats present this behavior problem at some point in their life. Most cats have a specific preference about where they want to eliminate. Elimination disorder is inappropriate elimination, including but not limited to, marking or eliminating only on horizontal surfaces, deposits in large amounts, unusual squatting postures, eliminating in and outside of the litter box, and only using the litter box for urination or defecation but not both. A cat with an elimination disorder can have a major impact on the human-animal bond, causing strain on the relationship. The good news is that litter box problems can always be managed and often resolved.

## Causes

Several factors may coincide in the cause of your kitty's litter box blues. Some common causes of litter box problems include: medical problems, dislike of the litter box, infrequent box cleaning, stress-related behaviors, poor litter box location, not enough litter boxes per cat ratio, residual odor outside of the litter box, negative association with litter box, change of residents (two or four-legged), change in home and/or home furnishings, change in daily routine, and other stressors. If your cat begins to eliminate in areas outside of the litter box, first contact your cat's veterinarian to rule out medical concerns. Many medical conditions can cause a change in a cat's litter box habits. If the cat is given a clean bill of health, then the problem is most likely behavioral.

## Addressing the Problem

It is important to first rule out any medical problems. If the problem turns out to be behavioral, solutions often include tracking your cat's behavioral history, making environmental changes, and shaping the cat's behavior. Most litter box problems can be solved with behavior and environment modifications. Punishment is not the solution in this situation! If your cat has a history of behavioral marking or behavioral issues, contact an animal behavior specialist experienced with cat behaviors. Try these steps to correct or prevent litter box blues in your home:

- Clean the litter box on a regular schedule, at least once daily
- Change the litter out of the box once to twice weekly
- Try a variety of litter box sizes and styles, often a larger litter box works best
- Make sure the litter box is easy to get in and out of, avoid high-side litter boxes
- Always have one litter box per cat, plus one
- Provide at least one litter box for every level of your home
- Place the litter box in a quiet, private, but accessible location
- Do not use litter box covers or liners because these may prevent litter box use
- Try different unscented cat litters
- Always feed and water your cat away from the litter box location
- Offer a variety of litter depths in different litter boxes
- Use a litter box attractant product or pheromone products, if needed
- Always clean soiled areas with a cleaner made for cat urine and stool