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## TOILET PROBLEMS WITH YOUR CAT??

Going to the toilet is a very natural act for your cat. The problem is that it's not the simple process we presume it is. Cat's urine and faeces carries information that is important for communication to other cats (and they think we understand it too!)



Whenever your cat rubs its cheek against your leg, it is smearing you with pheromones. These chemicals transmit information to other cats. Urine and faeces also contain pheromones which transmit information; about the cat's sexual status and its home territory. Saying "I was here" increases your cat's personal security and is calming for your cat, as well as sending out information to any visiting cats or other residents.

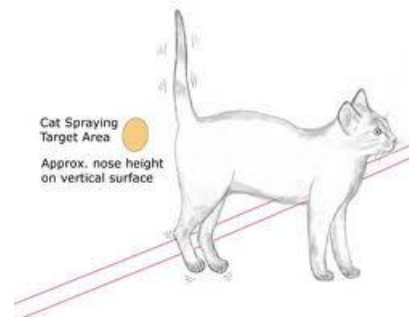
### What is your cat actually doing?

- 1) **Marking behaviour:** (this cat usually deposits small volumes of urine on vertical objects of prominence or importance to the cat, such as doors, curtains or walls. He reverses up to the area, may tread up and down with his back legs and his tail may quiver as he does this. Often they advertise like a billboard- the more the traffic the better!)
- 2) **Showing inadequate house training or a dislike of the litter tray:** (this cat often deposits large amounts of urine or faeces outside the litter tray, and adopts a normal squatting position whilst doing so).
- 3) **Showing stress signs** when urinating or defecating: (panting, excess scratching of litter before going, making noises, passing unusual looking urine or faeces): this cat needs medical attention immediately.

Some cats do a bit of both marking and toileting outside the litter tray, and most still use the litter tray occasionally.

### Why do they do it?

- 1) **Marking behaviour** is totally about communication. Entire male cats are the biggest culprits as they have a lot to tell the feline world. Desexing will reduce this behaviour by 90%. Anything that makes a cat anxious about its territory may cause this behaviour. Other cats in the house, neighbouring cats entering the backyard, visitors, changes in your routine such



as shift work, visitors, even a new stereo can cause marking. It can be seen in either sex. It is often described as “pee-mail” as this cat has something to tell you!

- 2) **Going to the toilet outside the litter tray** is a different problem. It is usually caused by a problem with the litter tray (the type of tray, the litter, the location, the cleanliness etc).
- 3) **Showing stress whilst going to the toilet** is unusual and means your cat has a medical problem that needs attention.

### **What can you do???**

#### **Strategy no.1**

##### **Rule out medical illness.**

Cats that need to go to the toilet more frequently or more painfully than usual may be suffering from a variety of medical reasons such as urinary tract infections, food intolerance, intestinal worms, constipation, diabetes etc. It is safest to start by getting a general health check-over for your cat including a urine examination from your regular veterinarian. If your cat is straining and not passing anything, get urgent attention!

#### **Strategy no. 2**

##### **Litter tray etiquette.**

Cats are desert creatures which have evolved with sand under their paws. If your cat perches on the edge of the tray, jumps in and out rapidly from the tray, shakes its paws after using the tray, or toilets directly next to the tray, it doesn't like the toilet!

This may be because the litter is not of the texture they like. Sand-like, finely granular, clumping and non perfumed litter is the most preferred. However, your cat might need a choice before you can decide this.



Some cats have also learnt through prior experience (as a kitten, or in a previous home) to use carpet or laundry as the toilet. You can try placing small segments of carpet or towel etc (preferably with their urine scent on it) in the tray to investigate this possibility.

Cats are clean creatures. They like the litter scooped out daily, and washed out and completely replenished once weekly. Hooded trays are often much more smelly and can deter a fastidious cat.

Access and location is very important. If you have more than one cat, you need 1 tray per cat plus one extra. Make sure they can get in and out easily (beware lips and high edges for elderly or young cats), they don't get “blocked” by other bossy animals, and don't get pestered by hungry dogs. They need a separate exit so they can get out easily.

Depth of litter may be an issue. Studies suggest 3cm is a safe minimum depth to use.

They like their privacy so ensure the tray is in a quiet area of the house!

(see the handout: “cat friendly litter trays and scratching posts”)

#### **Strategy no.3**

##### **Clean the area where they have eliminated properly.**

Cats “top up” areas where they have eliminated when they detect the odour is fading. If they can't tell where they've been, they're less likely to go back!

If they have sprayed on the wall, this has probably dribbled onto the floor. Clean the entire area thoroughly with a non-ammonia based disinfectant, dry it well (hairdryer,

sunlight), and apply an enzymatic, biodegradable odour neutralising agent such as urine-off ®.

#### **Strategy no.4**

##### **Change the nature of the location.**

Placing a bowl of food, or a pot plant in the area, or placing bubble wrap or foil on the floor where they've eliminated can make the area take on a different meaning.

#### **Strategy no.5**

##### **Re-teach them to use the tray.**

Some cats may have had a bad experience on the tray, such as being caught to be medicated whilst on the tray, scared by a dog, having a painful wee due to a bladder infection, and as a result, developed a fear of the tray. These cats need to re-learn that the tray was not the cause for pain or fear. Sometimes keeping them in an isolated room with the tray, bed, food, water, toys, and regular visitors for cuddles and games can help them reacquaint themselves with the tray.

#### **Strategy no.6**

##### **Reduce anxiety.**

Cats which are marking often respond well to anti-anxiety medication. However; it is far more preferable and kind to determine what is causing the anxiety and to rectify that before asking for medication your cat. A veterinary behaviourist is the best person to help you identify possible triggers, methods of behaviour modification to use, and to advise if medication is required, and if so, which is best.

A synthetic pheromone based on the facial pheromone cats use to declare territory, can also be very helpful. This is available from most veterinarians and is called Feliway®. It can be sprayed directly onto the areas where your cat has urinated or defecated, or is also available as a diffuser which is gently released into the air on a continual basis.



#### **Strategy no.7**

##### **Know who the culprit is!**

This is of utmost importance if you have more than one cat!

Never presume it's the "scaredy-cat" in the house. Cats are the masters of subtle body language. You may need an over-night video on the area to spy with, or a veterinary behaviourist can give other tricks to identify the one responsible. This is of most importance if marking, and therefore anxiety, are involved. There would be no gain in treating the wrong cat!

#### **Strategy no.8**

**Re-read all these hints or seek further help before you give up. Help is available, and is a lot cheaper than replacing all you carpets, and a lot kinder than replacing your cat!**