

Litterbox Do's and Don't's

If your cat starts to eliminate outside of the box, either urine or feces, it is important to immediately bring your cat in for an exam. This can indicate a severe and potentially life-threatening medical issue. After any medical condition is ruled out, behavioral causes are next examined.

There are numerous behavioral reasons that are common for urinating or defecating outside of the litterbox. Any stressor can trigger this, such as a new pet or changes in routine.

It is important to place the box in an area that is easily accessible, yet quiet. The number of litterboxes is also important. Having one more box than the number of cats is preferred. Two cats should have three boxes. This allows the cats to preferentially choose one box, or allows your cat to urinate in one box and defecate in another.

Make sure not to get a box with sides that are too high which makes it hard for them to easily get in or out of. This is especially important with older cats who might struggle with arthritis. Also some boxes are covered. With more than one cat these might not be ideal, as they could feel trapped in the box. Providing a covered box initially is OK as some cats are shyer in their elimination habits. Monitor which box is more heavily used and use that type.

The type of litter used is helpful. Unscented clumping litter is preferred by cats. Scented litters, though possibly preferred by us, may not be pleasing to the cat. There are also pellets and crystals. Determine which is used the most and primarily use that type.

Cleaning the box daily is best, as cats do not like to step on dirty litter. It also allows you to monitor their habits. Watching the amount of urine can help catch medical problems more quickly. There are many diseases that cause cats to urinate more, such as kidney disease, diabetes, and hyperthyroid, to name a few. If the amount of urine decreases, this could mean a urinary infection/disease and should be addressed immediately.

