

# INAPPROPRIATE URINATION

Otherwise known as “Cats that pee where they shouldn’t” ...

Inappropriate urination (urinary incontinence) is one of the most common complaints from cat owners. Cat urine has a strong odour and most people find it upsetting to come home to a liquid “surprise” from their feline pal.

There are a number of reasons that a cat will choose to urinate outside their litterbox. These can usually be divided into two general categories – medical problems or behavioural issues. It is important to differentiate the causes of inappropriate urination, as the treatments are quite different.

There are many possible medical causes of inappropriate urination. They include

- Urinary tract/bladder infections
- Crystals in the urine or bladder stones
- Idiopathic cystitis (blood in urine with no bacterial infection)
- Diabetes mellitus
- Kidney disease
- Bladder cancer
- Nerve damage

Tests done by your veterinarian can determine if there is a medical cause to the incontinence. These tests include:

- **Urinalysis:** A urinalysis requires a small sample of fresh urine, which is as uncontaminated as possible. Your vet may collect it in hospital via cystocentesis (placing a needle into the abdomen and collecting urine directly from the bladder). Urinalysis results can show if there is blood, bacteria, crystals or other signs of infection in the urine. Infections can be successfully treated with antibiotics. Crystals in the urine usually require a food change to adjust the pH (acidity) of the urine
- **Bloodwork:** Bloodwork is needed to identify diseases such as diabetes and kidney disease. These conditions require medications and a diet change.
- **X-rays:** X-rays can show if there is a bladder “stone”. Bladder “stones” often require surgery, but in some cases can be treated with a diet change alone.
- **Abdominal ultrasound:** Ultrasound will detect bladder stones as well as tumors.

If your cat is urinating very small amounts (i.e.: toonie sized or less) or is straining or crying when they urinate, they may be “blocked”. Male cats are at a higher risk for “blocking” due to their anatomical make-up. This is a very serious condition that requires emergency veterinary attention to relieve the blockage immediately. If the cat is not treated in time, the bladder can rupture and the cat could die. A cat with a urinary blockage will likely become listless and not want to eat. They may also vomit from the back up of toxins.

With behavioural incontinence, the urination is often in the form of “spraying” - on a vertical surface with the cat raising and quivering its tail and backing up to the surface before directing the spray of urine backwards. It is often detected by the owner in doorways or windows. Households with more than one cat, especially if one of the cats goes outside, are more likely to have this problem. Sometimes a cat that is indoors will spray if it sees another cat outside. Don’t be fooled...a female cat is just as likely to spray as a male cat. Other cats will urinate on specific items, like shoes, their owners’ dirty laundry, or the new baby’s things. Generally, these cats are “insecure” about their status in the household. Many cats are easily stressed by a new baby, a move, renovations, or any other changes in the household. Reducing their stress level, if possible, is important. There are also medications that can be used to reduce the anxiety levels in these cats or products containing pheromones can often help resolve the problem.

Sometimes the problem of urinary incontinence can simply be due to the litterbox itself. Some cats are very particular and will not use a dirty box. The type of litter in the box can also be an issue, as well as the style of litter box. Many cats will not use a box with a hood or flap on it. Location is another thing to consider. If the box is in a busy or noisy location, or is difficult to get to (i.e.: the cat must pass by the dog) then you may want to consider adding another box or finding a more private location. If inappropriate urination is an issue then the easiest thing to start with is changing the litterbox daily and using an unscented clay litter. If this does not resolve the issue, then a visit to the vet is probably a good idea.

Submitted by Dr. Nicole Guyett