

Cat Spraying vs. Peeing Outside the Litter Box



A guide on how to identify whether your cat is spraying versus inappropriately urinating, addressing the underlying cause and eliminating the problem.



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IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

One of the most common complaints that cat owners have is that their pet is peeing outside of the litterbox. While many owners may think that pee is pee, spraying/marketing and urinating outside of the litter tray are not the same thing and they have different causes. Identifying which problem your cat has is vital to addressing the underlying cause and eliminating the problem.

Consider	Spraying	Inappropriate Urination
Is your cat backing up to a vertical surface, such as a wall or the side of your couch?	✓	✗
Is your pet's tail lifting and twitching before the urine is sprayed out onto that surface?	✓	✗
Is your cat crouching and urinating in a normal position?	✗	✓
Is your pet urinating on a horizontal surface?	✗	✓

THE CAUSES

Spraying/Marking: A cat that sprays is often exhibiting normal cat behavior; however, stress can exacerbate the problem. Marking is also a way that cats communicate, and in a multiple-cat household, this behavior may be the result of competition for resources (food, water, litterbox, etc.).

Is your cat showing signs of stress?	Spraying	Inappropriate Urination
Reduced Activity	✓	✗
Aggression	✓	✗
Hypervigilance	✓	✗
Overgrooming	✓	✗
Increased/Decreased Interaction	✓	✗
Increased Face-Rubbing/Scratching	✓	✗

THE CAUSES

Inappropriate Urination: A cat that pees outside of the litterbox may be suffering from an underlying health issue, as there are many diseases and conditions that can contribute to inappropriate urination. The problem also could be behavioural, as cats may be fussy about the type of litter used and the location and cleanliness of the box.

Consider	Spraying	Inappropriate Urination
Is it possible your cat has arthritis or a disease of the urinary tract like cystitis, bladder tumours, or bladder stones?	✗	✓
Could your cat have diabetes, kidney disease, or hyperthyroidism?	✗	✓
Is your cat getting older and possibly suffering from senility?	✗	✓
Have you tried using other types of litter?	✗	✓
Is the litter box in a quiet location, and is it cleaned regularly?	✗	✓

THE SOLUTION

As a cat owner, you understandably don't appreciate spraying/marketing or inappropriate urination inside the home, so if you are dealing with this problem, you'll want to address it right away.

Spraying/Marking: If you have determined that your cat is spraying, there are a number of things you can do.

Consider:

- Neuter your cat if he is a male, and spay her if she is a female.
- Maintain a consistent routine to avoid stress.
- Provide one more food bowl and water bowl than the number of cats in the household, and place each in a different, suitably private location.
- Think before introducing new pets to the household, as this can cause stress in your cat and can also create competition for resources.
- Ensure strange cats can't come into your home.
- Create plenty of 3D spaces for your cat to explore, provide at least one scratching post, and offer a rotating supply of interactive toys.
- Allow your cat to decide when to go outside and come back in.
- Provide a safe hideaway for your cat at all times.
- Talk to your vet about pheromone diffusers, dietary supplements, and helpful medications.

THE SOLUTION

Inappropriate Urination: If your cat is urinating inappropriately, your pet may have a medical or behavioural issue.

Consider:

- Take your cat to the vet for a thorough checkup, and discuss your concerns.
- Avoid a high-lipped litter tray if your cat has any mobility issues.
- Try different types of litter to determine if your cat has a preference; some cats can be very fussy about litter type.

Both: Regardless of the problem and underlying cause, litter tray management is essential.

Consider:

- Provide one more litterbox than number of cats, placed in private, separate locations.
- Ensure litter trays are easily accessible.
- Clean out litter trays regularly.
- If the problem persists, move the tray to the area where the cat is urinating or spraying, then slowly move it back to its regular location.

If the problem persists after trying these suggestions, schedule another appointment with your veterinarian, as he or she may have further insight on your pet's particular medical condition.

BONUS TIPS

If your cat has been urinating or marking outside of the litterbox, you've probably tried all sorts of cleaning methods. Here are some tried-and-true tips for dealing with the mess.

Consider:

- Avoid ammonia-based products, as these can attract cats back to the same spot.
- Use a commercial enzymatic cleaning spray.
- Add biological washing powder to water and use this combination to clean the area.
- Allow the cleaner to completely soak into the dirty area for 10 to 15 minutes before blotting up the excess and allowing the space to dry.
- Prevent your cat from accessing the area while you are cleaning it.