



Kansas City Pet Project

www.kcpetproject.org

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My Cat Isn't Using the Litter Box

Litter box problems mean unhappiness all around. You don't enjoy coming home to find a stinky wet spot on the couch. And your disappointment and frustration can be frightening for your cat.

You can usually solve litter box problems easily once you've figured out their cause. Here's a hint: Fluffy isn't being spiteful—there's something wrong. Not using the litter box is his way of telling you that. We'll help you hear what he's saying, so you can solve both your problems.

Are You and Your Cat Ready for Litter Box Success?

Check off each of these questions as you answer. Once you're able to answer "yes" to all of them, you should have nothing to worry about.

- Is my cat spayed or neutered?**
- Do I have at least as many litter boxes as I have cats, plus one more?**
- Am I scooping the litter twice a day** and thoroughly emptying and cleaning the box once every 10–14 days, using warm, soapy water?
- Is the box an uncovered box, with no litter box liners?**
- Is the box at least as long as my cat's body and wide enough for him/her to turn around in?**
- Are the sides of the box low enough for my cat to easily step in** (this is particularly important for kittens and older cats who may have arthritis)?
- Am I pouring the litter approximately two to three inches deep for adults and one half to one inch deep for kittens?** (Cats don't like litter that's too deep—a good sign that you've got the depth or texture right is if your cat scratches around in the litter.)
- Am I using an unscented, fine-grained clumping litter?** (Listen for the sound of your cat happily scratching in the box.)
- Do I use the same type and brand of litter all the time?** (Cats don't like change.)
- Have I placed the litter boxes in safe places:** in corners, in low traffic areas that the cats like to be in, far from food and water bowls, and not near any household appliances (washing machines /dryers) that might scare the cats?
- Do I have at least one litter box on every level of my house?**

- If I have multiple cats, are the litter boxes in safe locations where a cat can easily dart away if she feels the other cat(s) may try to pounce while she's using the litter box?** Note: Litter boxes in closets and under the sink are of no use to cats who are being bullied by other cats.
- Has my cat been checked out by a veterinarian and given a clean bill of health?**



A litter box that's next to an appliance doesn't feel safe like a safe place to your cat. Mike McFarland/The HSUS

Top Five Reasons Your Cat Isn't Using the Litter Box

If your cat isn't using the litter box, it's probably because your cat is one of the following:

- Not neutered** and by seven or eight months is becoming sexually mature and seeking to mark territory around the home. **Fix: Have him neutered.**
- Unhappy with the litter box** or something relating to the litter box—its size, location, type, or litter. **Fix: Make some litter box changes** (see the **Help Your Cat Resolve Litter Box Issues** section.)
- Sick.** These are some of the medical conditions that make a cat unable or unwilling to use the box: urinary tract infections, urinary blockages, and urinary crystals. **Fix: Take her to a veterinarian.**
- Feeling unsafe around the other cat(s) in the home.** and doesn't use the litter box for fear of being pounced on. **Fix: Improve their relationship.**
- Stressed by something new** in or outside the home (including other cats) and is marking territory as a way to comfort him or herself. **Fix: Help your cat feel more relaxed.**

Knowing what's causing the trouble will make it easier for you to pick which solution listed in the **Help Your Cat Resolve Litter Box Issues** section to try first. And even if you still aren't certain, that section should give you and your cat the help you need.



The first step to take when your cat stops using the litter box is straight toward your veterinarian's office for an exam.

Help Your Cat Resolve Litter Box Issues

Check off each suggestion once you've tried it.

- Take your cat to the vet for a complete exam and to discuss the litter box issues.**
- If your cat isn't neutered or spayed yet, take care of this as soon as he or she is old enough.**
- Clean any soiled areas in the home with an enzymatic cleaner** (such as Urine Off or Anti-Icky-Poo), not household cleaners, steam cleaning, ammonia, or bleach.
- Make sure the litter box is set up in a way that will make your cats most comfortable.** Here are some guidelines:
 - Don't use litter box liners.
 - If the box has a cover, take it off.
 - Provide a box that is at least as long as the cat's body and then some, and wide enough so that he or she can turn around easily.
 - Check to see if the sides of the box are too high. This is particularly important for kittens and older cats who may have arthritis.
 - Pour the litter approximately two to three inches deep for adults and one half to one inch deep for kittens. (Cats don't like litter that's too deep—a good sign that you've got the depth or texture right is if your cat scratches around in the litter.)
 - Use an unscented, clumping litter that is fine-grained. (Listen for the sound of your cat scratching in the box.)
 - Find a litter the cat likes, and then don't switch brands (cats don't like change).
 - Scoop the litter twice a day and thoroughly empty and clean the box once every 10 to 14 days, using warm, soapy water.
- Set up at least as many litter boxes as you have cats, plus one additional box.** Here are some guidelines for where to put a litter box:
 - Set up at least one litter box on every level of my house.

- Put the litter boxes in corners, in low traffic areas of the home that are easy for the cats to get to, far away from food and water bowls, and not near any household appliances (washing machines/dryers) that might scare the cats.
 - If you have multiple cats, put the litter boxes in locations where a cat can easily escape if he feels the other cat(s) may try to pounce on him while he's using the litter box. Note: Litter boxes in closets and under the sink are not safe places for cats who are being bullied by other cats.
- Temporarily place a litter box where the cat has shown a preference for urinating / defecating.** For example, if the cat keeps urinating next to the couch, place a litter box there until the cat is using the litter box again.
- Gently deter the cat from going to the bathroom in the undesirable area** (don't express anger).
- **If you're protecting the floor or a rug, move furniture to cover it or cover it with double-sided tape or an upside-down carpet runner** (/if that doesn't work, try spraying the tape or runner with a citrus smell.)
 - **If your cat is going on the sofa, temporarily place a plastic shower curtain over the furniture.**
 - **If your cat is going on clothes lying around, pick up the clothes.**
 - **If your cat goes in the bathtub or the sink, close the drain and fill the tub or sink with one to two inches of water** when you're not using it.
- Reduce your cat's stress level.** Consider using one of the synthetic cat pheromones to help reduce the cat's stress.
- Reduce tensions between your cats.**
- Make sure that no one in the home is showing anger or frustration towards the cat because of this litter box issue.** Note: Your cat will pick up on your stress or anger, and this will make her even more stressed—which will make her more likely to keep going outside the litter box. **It is extremely important that the cat be protected from stress while this problem is being resolved.**



Helping your cat get back to using the litter box could be as simple as filling the box to a depth that's comfortable for him. KC Theisen/The HSUS