

Litter Box Issues



There are many reasons why a cat may stop using its litterbox. To further complicate things, sometimes the reason the litter box problem initially started may not be the same reason it is continuing. For example, your cat may have stopped using the litter box because of location stress (the dryer bumping while running, if the litterbox is next to it), and has now developed a habit of using a corner of the room where it is quieter.

You need to address all factors in order to resolve the problem. Let's look closer at the reasons why your cat might have stopped using their litterbox:

- **Medical Reasons**
 - The most common medical issue that will have cats avoiding their litterbox is a urinary condition. A urinary tract infection or crystals in the urine can often cause pain that cats will then associate with the litterbox, and so they avoid it.
 - What now? A trip to your veterinarian for an examination and some medication will often resolve the issue.
- **Behavioral Reasons**
 - *Anxiety* can also cause inappropriate litter box usage in cats. Stress due to a move or having new people or animals around can cause cats to avoid the litterbox until they are more comfortable.
 - What now? To address anxiety, try to make every experience with the new person or in the new home a positive one. If the source of stress is having a new person around, have that person take on the role of primary caretaker and allow them to be the one who feeds, offers treats to and plays with the cat to reduce the stress associated with them.
 - *Aversion* to the box can occur if something negative happened to the cat while they were in the box. For instance if there was construction in your home that occurred near to where your cat uses the litter box, then the cat may have a developed fear of using the box. Another example of this is if the litterbox is not kept clean enough for your cat, they may choose to eliminate somewhere they perceive as more sanitary.
 - For fear-based aversion: Try setting up a litter box in a new location away from the thing that caused them to be afraid.
 - For cleanliness aversion: Make sure your cat's litter box is kept very clean. Some cats prefer their litter to be scooped multiple times per day! You can also increase the amount of litter boxes that are in your home. As a general rule, try to have one more litterbox than the number of cats you own (e.g. if you have 2 cats, have 3 litter boxes).
 - *Surface preferences* happen when your cat uses the same surface type to eliminate, for example soft surfaces like laundry or blankets, rather than in the litterbox.
 - Add some of your cat's preferred surface type near the litter box; for example, put a towel under the box to encourage them to go near it. You will also have to make the spots where they were going to the bathroom inappropriately undesirable. Thoroughly clean that area clean and then put something in the area the cat will discourage the cat from going near it again, such as aluminum foil or citrus essential oils.
 - *Location Preferences* are when your cat likes to use a certain type of location as its bathroom instead of the box; for instance, a quiet corner in the basement.
 - If possible, put a litter box in the location where your cat has been eliminating. If it isn't a convenient location to keep the litter box permanently, wait until the cat has been using the litter box for at least one month and then slowly move the box to where you'd like it to be.

Remember to never punish or yell at your cat when they have litter box trouble. Cats don't stop using their litter boxes because they're mad or upset with you; they are simply doing what works best for them. Work together to solve the problem with your cat!

