

CAT TOILETING BEHAVIOUR

Why does your cat toilet outside the litter tray?

Cats toileting outside the litter tray or around the house is a common issue reported by families, but with the right information, it is generally relatively easy to resolve.

The first step when you notice a sudden behaviour change in a pet is to organise a health check. House soiling can be a symptom of a medical issue which could cause a cat discomfort or an inability to make it to the litter tray in time. Your cat might also develop an aversion to using the litter tray if they have learned to associate the area with pain.

Cats are fastidiously clean

A cat's sense of smell is several dozen times better than our own. If a dirty box smells unpleasant to us, imagine what it must be like for a cat to enter. Some cats will avoid using a litter tray if the litter has been soiled even once. Instead, they will seek out a toilet they consider "clean" such as your bathtub or fresh bed sheets!

Remember to scoop litter trays at least twice a day and clean them thoroughly at least every fortnight.

Cats like their own scent, especially when stressed

Cats are very sensitive creatures that love routine and can be upset by changes in their environment.



Anything from moving house or a new baby, to a new perfume or moving a piece of furniture from its usual spot can all cause stress.

Your cat might eliminate in a different part of the home to restore their scent if feeling anxious. They may also be trying to mask an unfamiliar scent with their own.

Did you know that stressed cats can sometimes seek to mesh their scents with their owner's, which helps them feel more secure? This is another reason why your cat might choose your bed to toilet on.

How can you help your cat feel safe?

- Provide safe hiding spaces and lots of high resting places to increase your cat's territory
- Help your cat cope with stress by engaging in interactive play a couple of times a day
- Close your blinds at night so your pets aren't disturbed by neighbourhood cats
- Let your cat rub against a cloth and wipe it over new furniture
- If you have more than one cat make sure you have plenty of resources for each so they don't feel in competition (litter trays, scratching posts, high resting spaces, food and water bowls, toys, playtime and one-on-one time with you)

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- Set up a quiet room when visitors come to the house if loud guests scare the cat
- If your cat is stressed by a member of the family such as a new baby, children or other pets, you can help by providing treats and playtime when near the source of stress. This will help to change the way your cat feels from negative to positive.

What is the ideal litter tray set up?

- Trays should be large and open, at least 1.5 times the size of your cat
- Avoid hooded trays and make sure the sides aren't too high for cats to climb into the box
- As a general rule you should provide at least one tray per cat plus a spare (two trays for one cat, three trays for two cats and so on)
- Cats instinctively feel vulnerable when toileting as the smell can attract unwanted attention from other animals. It's important to provide a good vantage point and multiple potential escape routes. Position trays in easily accessible areas (avoid corners, cupboards and under sinks)
- Place litter trays away from your cat's food and water bowls
- Trays should be dispersed throughout house and out of sight of each other
- Avoid placing trays in busy areas or near loud sounds such as the washing machine
- Litter trays should not be accessible to dogs or children. You can use baby gates to create privacy
- Cats prefer sand-like, clumping litter
- Litter should be at least 4 inches deep
- Avoid scented litter and litter tray liners



Accidents happen!

If there are accidents, remain calm and clean the area with an ammonia-free cleaning product.

Whatever the cause, punishment is not the answer. This will only damage your relationship with your cat and make the problem worse. Deterrents such as citrus peel or water sprays will encourage your cat to choose another spot, cause further anxiety and delay appropriate treatment of the behaviour.