

URINE MARKING

Cat urine marking (spraying) is a social, sexual or territorial behavior – an indirect communication system. Although this is a normal behavior for cats, most owners consider it unacceptable when it occurs inside the house. When a cat urine marks, she is displaying her emotions – stress, frustration, fear, insecurity, etc...

First and foremost, check in with your veterinarian to be sure that there is not a medical cause for your cat urine marking. Disease, infection, injury, poor vision, etc... can all cause a cat to start urine marking.

COMMON REASONS FOR URINE MARKING

- Medical issue (i.e. urinary tract infection)
- Not altered (spayed/neutered)
- Conflicts with other animals in the home
- Perceived conflict with animals outside the home (i.e. feral cats, wild critters, etc.)
- Stress
- Household chaos or change
- Addition of a new furry friend
- Routine change
- Dirty litterbox

RECOGNIZING URINE MARKING

Urine marking is not the same thing as inappropriate elimination (i.e. not using the litterbox). Cats who urine mark will also use their litterboxes for elimination. The following are characteristics of urine marking:

- Urine marks are usually deposited on vertical surfaces.
- Less urine than emptying the bladder during regular elimination.
- Odor is very pungent (more so than regular cat urine).
- A cat that is urine marking typically stands straight up with her tail erect and (sometimes) twitching.

MULTI-CAT HOUSEHOLDS

If you have multiple cats in the home, you'll have to determine which cat is the culprit. You can ask your veterinarian for a product called fluorescein, which causes urine to glow blue under ultraviolet light for 24 hours. If you give it to one cat at a time, you can determine who is marking. If you are unable to get fluorescein you can isolate your cats one at a time to determine which one is marking.

Cats like their space. Offer lots of low-to-the-ground hiding places (boxes, crates, shelves) and vertical spaces (shelves on the wall, cat towers) for your cats. Providing your cats with multiple spaces to hang out can help to reduce the tension that comes from sharing a living space.



Sometimes a perceived lack of resources can cause stress in multi-cat households. Ensure you are providing enough food and water stations throughout your home – one station for each cat; and multiple toys, cat trees, perches, scratchers, etc... so each cat in the home can make use of them without coming into contact with another cat.

When you bring a new cat into the household, confine her to the Cat Safe Zone (see below) and use desensitization activities (see [Cat-Cat Intros](#) tips sheet) to give both the new cat and your resident cat time to adjust.

OUTDOOR VISITORS

Outdoor visitors (feral cats, wild critters, etc...) can often cause a cat in the home to urine mark on or near the areas where the outdoor visitor can be seen – most often around doors and windows. Block your cat's visual access by closing blinds/curtains, and prevent physical access by installing baby gates, closing doors or moving objects so your cat can not come in contact with the area. Deter outdoor visitors by installing motion activated sprinklers, using a TNR service for feral/outdoor cats or planting aromatic plants in your yard or garden.

REDUCING STRESS

Play with your cat frequently. Play reduces stress – so the more play your cat has, the less stress there will be. With less stress, urine marking problems may resolve on their own. Kittens should get at least four 15 minute play sessions a day and adult cats should get at least two 15 minute play sessions a day.

Consider adding a Feliway Multi-Cat diffuser in various areas throughout your home or using Feliway Spray on the urine marked areas. Studies have shown that these particular pheromones may assist in reducing stress levels.

THE LITTERBOX

Proper litterbox management and cleaning can have a significant effect on decreasing urine marking in cats. Make the litterbox as attractive as possible by:

- Cleaning twice daily (at minimum)
- Washing with warm, soapy water every two weeks
- Ensuring there is one more litterbox than there are the number of cats in the home
- Placing the litterbox in a low traffic area away from food and water dishes
- Providing a litterbox that is big enough for your cat
- Placing multiple litterboxes throughout your home
- Using your cat's preferred litter and type of litterbox (avoid covered and automatic boxes)

MEDICATION

There are medications available that may help cats that are urine marking. You will need to schedule a visit with a veterinary behaviorist to discuss medication options. Keep in mind, medication must be combined with a behavior protocol for it to be successful.



PAWSITIVELY HELPFUL HINTS



Avoid ammonia-based or other strong scented products for cleaning – as the smells associated with those cleaners are similar to cat urine. Use an enzyme based cleaner specifically made for pet odors instead. A black light may also be helpful in determining exactly where the soiled spots are.



Try placing the litterbox or scratching post in the areas where your cat is marking. You can also try an interactive play session where your cat is marking, as “hunting” builds confidence.



Make the areas where your cat is urine marking unattractive. Clean the areas well and place aluminum foil, carpet runners (nubby side out), heavy plastic or a strong smelling perfume on the areas.



Do not punish your cat for urine marking.



Ensure your cat is spayed and/or neutered.



Cat Safe Zone – An area in your home that can be completely closed off so that your resident cat cannot access it. The zone should **not** be in a place where your resident cats enjoy spending time. Ideally, the zone should be in an area or room that your resident cats either are not allowed to go or do not care about. The room needs to have adequate space for a litterbox, food & water dishes, toys and places to hide or get up high. Ideally, the room will have a window or other source for natural light. It is important that cats are able to express natural behaviors while in the room such as jumping and scratching – as this will eliminate some of the stress associated with being isolated in this room during the acclimation period.



If your cat is voiding her entire bladder or defecating outside of the litterbox, refer to the Litterbox Problems tip sheet for more information.



For help with managing outdoor or feral cats visit www.somanycats.org.