



Litter Box Issues in Cats

Accidents occasionally happen, but if you notice your cat pooping outside the litter box on a regular basis, an underlying medical, behavioral, or environmental issue is likely to blame.

Let's look at the most common litter box issues in cats, and how you can help your feline family member.

Why Is My Cat Going to the Bathroom Outside the Litter Box?

It can sometimes be challenging to figure out why they are not using their litter box. Let's look at the most common causes:

Medical

- **Digestive issues**, like constipation, diarrhea, inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)
- **Arthritis**, painful joints can contribute to a cat not wanting to step inside the litter box
- **Diabetes or kidney disease**, as these can lead to increased urination. If you're not keeping up with litter box cleanings, your cat may feel the box is too dirty or not appropriate for use.
- **Cognitive dysfunction**, which can cause increased anxiety in your cat. This may make them feel uncomfortable in their litter box.
- **Matted fur**, which—when surrounding the rectum—can cause pain or discomfort for your cat, which may lead to litter box avoidance.
- **Bladder/kidney stones**, which can cause severe pain and discomfort when a cat is trying to urinate.
- **Urinary blockage**, which means there is something obstructing a cat from urinating completely (or at all)
- **Intestinal blockage**, which means there is something obstructing a cat from defecating completely (or at all)

Environmental

- **The litter box is in the wrong location**, such as in a high-traffic spot or an area that makes a cat feel cornered
- **The wrong type of litter is being used**
- **The litter is too deep**
- **The litter box is dirty**

Remember—cats are creatures of habit, so changing their litter box (or any minor detail about it) can cause issues.

How Can I Help My Cat?

You can prevent your cat from going to the bathroom outside their litter box by keeping a few tips in mind:

- Choose the right litter.
- Once you've chosen the right litter, stick with it.
- Have the right amount of litter boxes—it's ideal to have one box per cat per level of the home, plus an extra per floor.
- Spread the litter boxes throughout your home.
- Keep litter boxes in quiet, low-traffic areas.
- Keep litter boxes in an area separate from your cat's food and water dishes.
- Keep your cat's litter box clean.
- Reduce your cat's anxiety/stress.

Behavioral

- **Resource guarding**, where cats become territorial of a litter box, causing other cats to go to the bathroom elsewhere in the home
- **Litter box preferences**, where a cat may be afraid if the box is covered, has high sides, or includes a cleaning robot
- **Spraying/marking**, which may mean a cat is under stress, attempting to attract a mate, or is communicating something to other cats in the household



Should I Bring My Cat to the Vet?

If your cat is going to the bathroom outside their litter box, it's important to work with your veterinarian to rule out a potential medical problem.

It's especially important for your cat to see their vet for an exam if you notice:

- Changes in your cat's stool consistency (softer/mushier stools or drier/harder stools)
- Changes in how frequently your cat is having bowel movements
- Decreased appetite
- Your cat is straining to defecate or urinate
- Your cat is urinating or drinking more frequently
- Blood or mucus in your cat's stool
- Blood in your cat's urine
- Your cat is displaying unusual behavior or is hiding

