

# HELP! My Cat Is Peeing Outside the Box!

We once thought that most of these cats had urinary tract infections and most were and are treated with antibiotics. Recent research shows that only 1-5 percent of cats with inappropriate urination (IU) have an infection and only about 5 percent or less have behavioral issues. We now know that many of these cats with IU, blood and protein in the urine and bladder pain have **Interstitial Cystitis** (also sometimes called Idiopathic Cystitis). Between 4-5 million cats with IU end up at shelters and most of them are destroyed.

**If your cat has inappropriate urination it should be taken to the veterinarian as soon as possible.** A urinalysis should be performed to rule out other causes such as an infection. If this is a chronic or recurrent concern then a urine culture/sensitivity should be submitted for analysis and blood work, abdominal x-rays and ultrasound should be done to rule out infection, kidney disease, diabetes, bladder or kidney stones, an abdominal tumor, etc.

We now know that many of these cats with IU have Interstitial Cystitis (IC). If the above testing is all negative and nothing else found, these cats most likely have IC. This is a **very painful disease** which involves bladder wall thickening, decrease in the GAG layer (the protective “slime” layer inside the bladder wall) and urine and inflammatory cell leakage into the bladder wall. When the cat attempts to use the box it hurts and the cat starts associating this pain with the use of the litter box and starts to urinate elsewhere. Often this IU is found on bedding, clothes, carpet, bath tubs, etc.

It is yet unknown why this happens in some cats but stress can definitely increase the chance of occurrence in the cat. Most of these will resolve spontaneously with the first episode in 5-7 days but most do recur within 6-12 months. **We now know that these cats should NOT be treated with antibiotics but rather with pain medication and anti-spasmodic tranquilizers for 5-7 days.**

There are many **things that can certainly decrease your cat’s stress** so try the following:

- Make sure to clean the litter box daily, especially if your cat has IC.
- Ideally, have 1 more box than the number of cats you have and place these in multiple areas of your home.
- Offer a couple different types of litter, preferably unscented.
- Clean urine soiled areas of the home well. Products such as *Equalizer*, *Urine Off* or *Zero Odor* seem to work well.
- Try *Cat Attract* litter.
- Use a large litter box, especially for cats over 6 pounds. I actually use a couple large sweater boxes for my cats.
- Use canned/wet food vs. dry kibble. Although there is no food labeled for this disease, in recent studies, cats fed canned food had a significant much less recurrence rate of IC.
- Always have fresh water available.
- Attempt to decrease the stress level of your cat. This is very important and has been shown to decrease the recurrence of IU!

Cats easily pick up on your stress levels and multi-cat homes can be more stressful for many cats. Holidays, moving, new pets in the home and dirty litter boxes can also cause much stress for your cat. Here are some recommendations for decreasing a cat's stress levels:

- Spend a little more quality time with your cat. Most inside cats are quite bored. Try the feather toys or laser pointer games.
- Offer a cat tower or climbing area for your cat. They like to get vertical.
- Purchase a bird, fish or other tape or DVD for your cat and play it while you are away.
- Offer "kitty drugs" such as catnip, honeysuckle, or valerian which can be very relaxing to many cats.
- Read a couple great books about cats such as *From the Cat's Point of View* by Gwen Bohnenkamp and *Felinestein* by Cindy Ribarich & Suzanne Delzio.

**So in conclusion, see your vet to diagnose this disease and when recurrence occurs. Then improve the cat's environment, offer canned/wet food and increase stimulation for your cat.** For more information you can also check out [www.perfectpaws.com](http://www.perfectpaws.com) or give us a call.

## **Litter Box Blues (A Follow-Up Article)**

There are many causes of **feline elimination problems** outside the litter box. A thorough physical examination and urinalysis should be done first to rule out any medical conditions. Urinary tract infections, anxiety, stress, dislike of litter or box or litter box placement, unclean litter boxes, and too few litter boxes can all play a role in inappropriate elimination behaviors with your cat.

The following may be helpful after no medical problems are found:

— Try to have 1 litter box per cat in household if at all possible.

— Most cats prefer uncovered litter boxes, especially if you have more than one cat. If you must have a covered box and you have more than one cat you may want to cut another exit hole in the box so your cat does not feel trapped.

— Most litter boxes are really too small for the average cat. For larger cats or those urinating outside the box we recommend a larger box-shallow sweater boxes work well.

— In a normal litter box visit your cat should spend a few minutes in the box, first digging, the using the box, and then covering the bm or urine. If he/she jumps in, goes quickly and does not dig or cover this may be a litter aversion problem and you should try a different litter.

— Sometimes moving the box to a less stressful (less traffic and noise) area may help. The box should be in the cat's "home area" or not too far away.

— Sometimes just buying a new, clean and different colored litter box will work well. Your cat may have a litter box aversion.

— Make sure to clean the litter box daily , especially for those cats that do not always use the box. Just as you or I would go to the next stall if we came upon a dirty public restroom so may your cat!

— If your cat is long-haired, often a paw and rear end hair trim will help.

**Remember to first take your cat to your veterinarian if it is not using the litter box to rule out any medical conditions.**