Ask a Veterinarian: Why Is My Cat Peeing Everywhere but in the Litter Box?

By Dr. Genie Bishop

Your cat might be urinating outside the litter box for a number of reasons. Some are simple and some are more complicated, so let’s start with the simple solutions first. The litter box itself might be the cause of the issue, so here are a few questions you should ask yourself:

• **When was the last time you thoroughly cleaned the litter box?** Cats are very clean creatures who spend much of their time grooming. If a cat finds the litter box too dirty, cleaning it is the simplest solution.

• **How many cats and litter boxes do you have?** Experts say you should have one box for each cat you own plus one extra, just in case they want to switch it up.

• **Where are the litter boxes located?** Are they in high traffic areas, like near a doorway? Are they difficult to access? Cats prefer their privacy, so putting the litter box in a quiet, secluded area of the house will help. Also, it’s important that your cat is able to get in the litter box. An older cat may find it difficult to get into a litter box with high sides. And even though you may prefer a covered box, some cats may be afraid to use it.

• **What type of litter do you use?** Some cats reject certain textures or scents, so you may have to try different types to find the one your cat prefers.
Now, let’s say you’ve tried everything, and the litter box does not seem to be the issue. What are some other possibilities? Here’s a quick checklist:

- Does your cat cry out in pain when trying to urinate?
- Do you ever see blood in the urine?
- Does she crouch and try to go without success?

If this sounds like your cat, you should call your veterinarian immediately. Cats with these signs could have feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD), which can have different forms and can occur for different reasons. Simplistically, some cats have urinary stones (urolithiasis) or microscopic crystals, while other cats have a condition called feline idiopathic cystitis (FIC).

Let’s start with urolithiasis. Some cats form urinary stones or microscopic crystals, which can become stones, in their urinary tract. Both urinary crystals and stones can result in discomfort and urinary obstruction, which is a life-threatening situation. If you see your cat straining to urinate but isn’t able to, call your veterinarian immediately.

Feline idiopathic cystitis is another form of FLUTD. Idiopathic means “cause unknown,” and that makes this is a very complex disease to understand. In this case, your veterinarian may find no evidence of stones and crystals. Environment and stress play an important role in this condition. The litter box, as we have discussed, is a big part of your cat’s environment and can play a major role in FIC. However, cats can become stressed for many other reasons:

- Not getting along with other pets in the household
- Houseguests
- New roommates
- New baby
- Boarding
- Moving to a new home

Cats with FIC may even have clinical signs that seem to disappear on their own, only to return later, making treatment very frustrating. And to make matters worse, their reaction to stress may affect parts of the body other than the urinary tract, such as the gastrointestinal tract.

What do I do?
Seek medical attention for your cat as soon as possible. Your veterinarian may order x-rays, blood tests and urinalysis to make a diagnosis. If there is a stone or obstruction, surgery may be necessary. Your veterinarian may recommend a special diet that can help dissolve or prevent certain crystals or stones, or at least make their
formation less likely. You may also need to work on minimizing the stressors in your cat’s life.

**Visit your Vet**

Your veterinarian is your best partner when providing care for your cat. Always follow your veterinarian’s recommendations for diets or medications. If signs continue, notify your vet as soon as possible.

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