

All About Pets

The national pet care information service



SPRAYING AND SOILING INDOORS



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

Cats are usually meticulous in their toilet habits and seldom soil indoors. It is not surprising that when your cat does do this you may be upset and unsure about what to do. Understanding the reasons why cats can soil or mark in the house may help to tackle the problem. In most cases soiling occurs because the cat is anxious or unsettled.



What is the difference between spraying and a cat's normal toilet habits?

Your cat uses both urine and faeces (droppings) to mark its territory. This gives information to other cats about its sex, age and state of health. It is also reassuring for your cat to be surrounded by its own familiar smell. When a cat is scent marking it does not squat. A spraying cat stands up facing away from the object it is marking and squirts just a few drops of urine backwards. The tail is raised vertically and the tip will probably quiver from side to side. Cats spray indoors (using urine as a marker) for reasons different to those that make it urinate indoors, so it is important to differentiate between the two.

Will my cat spray?

All cats, male or female, neutered or not, may spray outdoors. Un-neutered male cats are far more likely to spray. Having your cat neutered will reduce the risk of problems but spraying may still occur for emotional rather than sexual reasons.

Can spraying be caused by a physical illness?

Indoor spraying occurs due to a psychological disturbance in your cat. Your vet may want to check your cat for conditions such as diabetes, kidney diseases or bladder problems that may cause it to urinate in the wrong place at the wrong time – but these diseases will not make your cat spray.

Will punishment solve the problem?

Shouting at your cat or physically punishing it will increase the likelihood of spraying happening again, as your cat will feel even more frightened or insecure.



Where will my cat spray?

Cats usually spray against a vertical surface at the entrance to the house or room – doorframes are a favourite spot. However, they may also spray pieces of furniture, curtains or household equipment. Sometimes cats will mark any unfamiliar object that has been brought into the home and, occasionally, even people may be sprayed!

How do I get rid of the smell?

Rub down the affected area with a damp cloth and then use a biological odour eliminator. Your vet will be able to recommend a suitable product. Standard disinfectants are not very useful. Some contain ammonia (a normal constituent of cat urine) that will make your cat think that another cat has marked over its spot and may encourage it to re-spray the area. Unfortunately the smell may persist for up to four weeks despite your best efforts at cleaning. Using a natural cat scent spray in the area may make your cat less likely to spray the area again. These scents can be detected by cats but cannot be detected by humans. When the area is clean, move your cat's feeding bowl nearby as cats will not spray near their eating area. Make sure the food bowl is filled with dry food, not canned food that will go stale.

Can the spraying be stopped?

If you can find out why your cat is spraying there is a good chance it can be stopped. This may need thorough detective work by you, your vet or an animal behaviourist. Perhaps an aggressive new cat has moved into the area and your cat feels threatened, or a rival cat has come into your house through your cat flap. If you have bought a new kitten or a dog, or if there is a new baby in the house, an older cat can feel nervous.

Sometimes it helps to give your cat the security of having a small territory completely to itself. It may also help to shut off the cat flap and let your cat in and out yourself – this way your cat will feel that its indoor den is secure and safe from intruders. Keep its bed, litter tray and water bowl in a room where it can feel safe. Treating areas where your cat spends a lot of time with a cat pheromone (natural cat scent) may make your cat more relaxed. Once the problem is controlled you can re-introduce your cat to the rest of the house gradually, room by room.



Will medical treatment help?

Sometimes your vet will suggest drugs to tackle the anxiety that is causing your cat to spray. These drugs may help in the short-term but it is vital to work out the underlying reason why your cat is unhappy.

If the problem is complicated or persistent you may need the help of a qualified animal behaviourist. Your veterinary surgeon will be able to put you in touch with one in your area.

Further information

For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk, the national pet care information service. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is provided by The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity. We rely entirely on your support to enable us to continue our vital work. Any contribution would be most welcome. Thank you.

This leaflet was produced in association with Vetstream Ltd

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Registered charity no: 224392

Photography: John Henderson • Indusfoto