

Spraying



A greater understanding

Urine marking around the home, or 'spraying', is one of the commonest feline 'behaviour problems' and one that is not always sufficiently understood by cat owners. Equally frustrating is the problem of defecating (pooing, or also known as 'middening') in the home. This leaflet sets out to explain the reasons for this inappropriate behaviour and different ways in which the problem might be tackled, or solved.

Why do cats spray?

A common misconception among many people is that spraying is fundamentally a feline 'territory marking' activity, predominantly carried out by unneutered (entire) male cats (or 'toms'). Undeniably, the smell of tom-cat urine is particularly pungent and thus, wherever it is deposited, it is most readily picked up by the human nose.

The majority of cats, however – be they male, female and neutered or not – will engage in some kind of spraying behaviour throughout their lives. The smell of female cats' urine, or neutered male cats' urine, can sometimes take longer to be detected around the home, because it is far less pungent than that of an entire male cat.

Common reasons for spraying

Cats are highly sensitive creatures and, as such, have a need to express any sudden feelings of anxiety or insecurity in some way – and spraying just happens to be one of the most common ways in which they do it.

Indeed, there can be many reasons, other than a simple desire to mark their territory, why different cats will take to inappropriate spraying or defecating – eg when they are ill, feeling under pressure, or stressed by something they perceive as worrying or threatening within their immediate living environment, (see paragraph *Why cats spray indoors – and suggested solutions*).

IT'S NOT DELIBERATE!

If you have a cat who has begun spraying around the home, then the first thing to realise is that he is not deliberately trying to upset, aggravate or 'defy' you – as can so often be imagined by exasperated owners. Instead, he is merely responding to his own basic genetic programming as a cat.

A method of communication

Additionally, inside or outside of the home, cats will direct urine sprays against vertical surfaces not just as a 'territory stamp', but also as a way of communicating with neighbouring cats. In such urine splashes, they effectively leave behind a wealth of information about themselves for other cats to find – like their age, sex, health status and how recently they were in the vicinity.

The point of this is not necessarily to intimidate or challenge other cats. It can also be a way that a cat seeks to integrate itself within a community of neighbouring cats, without recourse to more unpleasant open conflict or confrontation.

Similarly, such spraying can also act as a sort of 'self-comforting' strategy for many cats whenever they feel uneasy or insecure. Many cats also gain even more confidence to spray when accompanied or 'backed up' by their owners' presence – only too often owners don't realise this, and instead simply view it as some open and deliberate act of 'defiance' on their cat's part!



Spraying can be a form of feline communication

Spraying or urinating?

Before addressing these problems, it is very important to understand **the difference between a cat who is actually spraying and one who is merely urinating**. Spraying is carried out with the cat standing up, and pumping out small jets of urine on to a vertical surface. Urinating is performed with the cat squatting down, and typically producing a larger ‘puddle’ on the ground or surface below it.



Eliminating health reasons

If your cat has suddenly taken to spraying or urinating in inappropriate places round the home, it's always a good idea to get your vet to give him an overall health check. This is particularly important if you know that nothing ‘new’ or potentially stressful (eg a move, new baby, builders, other domestic upheaval, arrival of another cat or dog) in your cat's immediate environment could be responsible for such a change in his behaviour.

Cystitis/kidney disease

Underlying health problems, like cystitis or kidney disease, can often give a cat the urge to urinate far more often. In the case of cystitis, cats may also have the urge to constantly ‘spray’ out small amounts of urine in less appropriate places round the home, as this can be less painful for them than squatting, or offers some immediate relief from their condition.

Similarly, a cat who inappropriately deposits faeces round the home may also need a health check, to ensure that there is no underlying medical reason for such behaviour.

Indoor spraying and suggested solutions

Most cats, if generally healthy and secure, tend to confine their spraying activities to outdoors – to the extent that many owners may not even be aware that they do it.

If a cat is healthy, but takes to spraying – or, less commonly, defecating – indoors, then clearly one needs to first target the likely reason why. Some classic reasons include:



The cat is an unneutered male.

If this is the case, then neutering may greatly improve the problem.



The cat has not been trained as a kitten to use a litter tray, or previously led a stray or semi-feral existence, prior to being rehomed.

This makes it less likely that the cat can easily distinguish between places where it is, or is not, appropriate for him to spray, urinate, defecate, etc. It might help to keep your cat in a more confined area for a while, and provide him with a large, well-filled and constantly cleaned tray, so that eventually this becomes the most ‘logical’ place for him to go. (Also see paragraph *Persistent offenders*.)



The cat, if rescued or rehomed, is feeling fundamentally insecure about his new living environment.

The same could be said of any cat who has just been moved to a new home, and thus been deprived of the comfort of familiar territory and surroundings. Sometimes merely time and patience will solve this problem, as your cat gains greater confidence. But also see later advice sections for more help.

TRAY TIPS

- Place the litter tray in a quiet, secluded area of the house. More than one cat = more than one tray!
- Ensure the tray is large enough and cleaned regularly. Shy and/or nervous cats will benefit from a hooded litter tray.
- Cats may not use a litter tray if it is placed close to their food. Keep food and tray as far away from each other as possible.





The cat is living with too many other cats in close quarters.

Cats Protection recommends that an average three-bedroom house should ideally accommodate up to two cats. Think hard about the number of cats you keep in one small living area, as this can often be highly stressful for them, as they all seek to carve out their own bit of ‘personal space’. If only one of the cats you keep is a ‘sprayer’, then this cat may benefit from a less crowded living environment in another home, or a ‘patch’ that is more his own (see paragraph *Persistent offenders*).



Provide a quiet retreat for puss



The cat is living in a home that is simply too frenetic/noisy/chaotic for his more sensitive or timid nature.

Your cat may benefit from being given his own, calm, self-contained living quarters in a room or area of the house where he can retreat any time he likes and be left totally undisturbed.



The cat is feeling some sudden new sense of pressure/stress within his existing external environment – eg the arrival of a new cat/dog near or upon his customary outside territory.

Don't force your cat to go outside if he doesn't want to. Instead, restrict him to a smaller area of the house, with his own tray, food/water, cosy bedding, etc. Make an extra fuss of him daily to boost his confidence. Later on accompany him on any initial excursions outside for extra support, and over time he should gradually feel happier about his ability to cope with the changes within his external environment.



The cat is feeling some sudden new sense of pressure/stress within his existing internal environment – ie your home.

Such stresses could be caused by things like workmen, a new baby, dog or cat, the installation of a cat flap, noisy new guests or lodgers or a household member whose general manner/approach is viewed by the cat as somewhat aggressive or intimidating.

Again, your cat must be allowed his own 'safe' and quiet spot to go to in the home, totally undisturbed, whenever he feels pressurised by any of the above things.

Cat flaps often worry cats, because they allow other felines to come into your home from outside. If you think this is happening then you may have to lock the cat flap whenever you can't supervise it, or dispense with it altogether.



Discourage unwanted visitors

If you are bringing a new dog/cat into your home, then your existing cat needs to be allowed to come to terms with this 'intruder' on his patch very gradually, and in properly phased and stage-managed introductions which you will always supervise (see CP leaflet *Living in harmony*).

Do not allow the new cat/dog to bully or harass your existing cat in any way. Continue to make a special fuss of your existing cat to keep his confidence high and always allow him the option to escape the presence of a new pet, whenever he likes, and retreat to his own bit of secure 'personal space' and territory within your home.



An aggressive dog can upset his environment

Preventing the spraying 'habit cycle'

It is far better to begin practically addressing the problem as soon as you can. This is because the more often a cat is allowed to spray in the same place, the more ingrained the habit can become, and the more lasting the damage is to carpets and underlay.

Cleaning the area

Begin by cleaning very thoroughly any area that your cat has sprayed, because the feline sense of smell is very powerful, and if you do not remove all lingering traces of urine then your cat will repeatedly be drawn back to the same areas in an attempt to top up any 'fading' scent. **The way you clean such areas is also very important.**

Many popular household-cleaning substances are not suitable, because they contain ammonia and chlorine (eg bleach). Both of these compounds are found in cat urine, so you may simply make the problem worse.

THE BEST METHOD

- 1 Give any soiled areas a wash with a warm, dilute solution of biological washing powder, which removes the protein components in your cat's urine.
- 2 Rinse the area with cold water and allow to dry.
- 3 Next, spray or dab the whole area with surgical spirit, which removes any fatty deposits in the urine and, again, leave to dry thoroughly.
- 4 Do not allow your cat access to rooms/areas where you are undertaking the above cleaning regime.

Note: You should always do a small patch test on any fabric/carpet first to ensure that the above cleaning regime will not damage it.

There are other specialist cleaning products available to tackle the problem of spraying. The following suggestions have been provided by some of our volunteer workers:

- *Bettaware Pet Stain Remover* – (catalogue usually left on doorsteps).
- *Odourfree* by Alstoe Ltd – from your vet.
- Total Care Odour/Stain Remover by *Animalcare* – from your vet.
- Cat Spray and Urine Stain Remover by Simple Solution – from pet shops.
- *Ammo Cat* by Aquarium Pharmaceuticals Inc – from Pets At Home stores.
- To one pint of water add one tablespoon of *Napisan* and one tablespoon of biological washing powder.



Preventing your cat from spraying again

Once you have thoroughly cleaned any area where your cat has previously sprayed, it's a good idea not to allow your cat back into these areas again for at least a couple of days.

Before doing so, you may also try to rearrange the furniture around your cat's favourite former spraying spots – eg putting an armchair, small bookcase or other obscuring item in front of these spots so your cat can't readily access them.

Both the above measures may help to disrupt the habitual element of your cat's previous spraying behaviour.

Adding deterrents

Alternatively, or additionally, you could try placing sheets of aluminium foil on the floor beneath your cat's customary spraying spots, as most cats hate to tread on these. You could also try leaving bowls of food on the floor beneath these spots as a deterrent – please note, it's a good idea not to leave food your cat particularly likes, as he might just gobble this up, then spray merrily away again!

DO NOT PUNISH!

Whatever the reason for your cat's spraying behaviour, and however angry you may feel about it, **do your best to resist the urge to shout at him or punish him in any way.** Not only is this unkind, but it is also totally counterproductive. You will simply make your cat feel even more stressed, anxious or insecure, and thus even more likely to spray, in an attempt to relieve such feelings.

Veterinary help

In addition to the previous advice mentioned, certain **drug treatments** are now available from your vet to help combat the problem of feline spraying, though these will still have to be backed up with suitable behavioural therapy of a kind previously outlined.

In cases where spraying behaviour is anxiety-based, another possible option is the use of a special **'calming' feline pheromone** (*Feliway*) substance around the home, also

available from vets. Such pheromones are based on natural chemicals found in feline facial glands, and can be applied on to a cat's normal 'spraying areas', with the aim of reducing his anxiety levels.

Before deciding on any of the above options for your cat, however, do discuss the matter thoroughly with your vet.



Feliway helps to reduce anxiety

Persistent offenders

In many cases, a cat's episode of inappropriate spraying or defecation in the home will be short lived, and relate merely to a transient period of stress or upheaval in his life. Other cases may be rectified by previously outlined measures.

If you have a particularly persistent feline 'soiler' around the home, however, who fails to respond to any measures already suggested then this is likely to be:



Because you are unable to change, or remove, the environmental stress trigger or source that is perpetuating your cat's behaviour

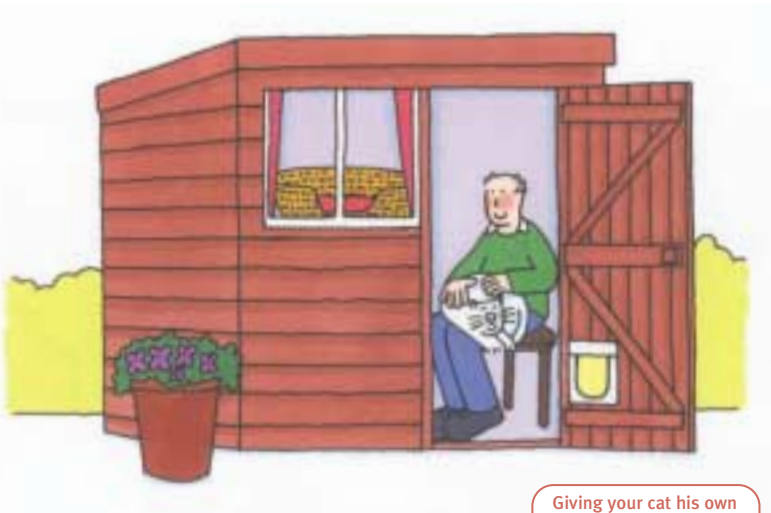


Because your cat's behaviour has become too deeply ingrained through repetition. Additionally, any soiling deterrent you offer the cat in the home might not be powerful enough to counteract the sense of reward he derives from such behaviour – even if this 'reward' may simply be immediate relief from feelings of anxiety/unease/insecurity, etc.

In both cases, and only if you really cannot stand your cat's indoor soiling habits a moment longer, then more drastic options might have to be considered.

One of these may be getting the cat rehomed within a far calmer and/or less crowded living environment; an option that can often benefit cats who find noisier homes, or those with too many other cats, a constant stress.

Many owners of persistent soilers, however, face the dilemma that no matter how much they hate their cat's habits in the home, they still cannot bear to part with him. For such owners there can be a compromise solution – and that's to give the cat his own entirely separate, self-contained living quarters.



Giving your cat his own 'den' can be a solution

Separate living

Ideal places for a cat's own personal space or 'den' is somewhere like a utility room, outhouse or shed. What's important is that this place is kept dry and warm, there is always ample food, water and cosy bedding available to the cat, and he can come and go from this place more or less as he wishes, without having to clash with other cats, dogs or noisier household members.

Ensure that you still have plenty of 'quality' time with him – eg grooming, playing and generally making a fuss of him – and your overall bond with him will stay intact.

Make sure that your cat is cosily and safely tucked up in his own quarters at night, and monitor his welfare constantly (much as you would do if he was living in your home) to check that he remains happy, healthy and well.

Adapting to the situation

Much to the surprise of many owners, a lot of cats adapt quite happily to such an arrangement – particularly those who have come from a stray, semi-feral or overcrowded (in terms of other cats) background, and thus tend to find living in close proximity with humans, or too many other peers, challenging or stressful.

The upside for owners is that they are spared the exasperation and resentment caused by a cat that permanently soils their cherished home furnishings, and thus their relationship with that cat can be restored to a much more affectionate, and rewarding, footing.

It must be stressed, however, that the above solution should only be seen as a last resort (short of rehoming) for truly incorrigible house soilers, and certainly not a first one for cats who have only just begun some form of spraying behaviour. Additionally, even though many cats may adapt happily to living in separate quarters, if your own cat is clearly not among these, then it is rather unkind to persist with such an arrangement.

Further help and advice

We've looked at different reasons why cats might spray or soil around the house, and what could possibly be done to solve such a problem.

Whatever the reason, it always helps to try to see things from your cat's point of view, rather than simply being cross with him. Remember, animals cannot talk to us, and thus can only communicate how they feel in the way they behave, even if it is not to our liking.

For more in-depth help with regard to your cat's spraying, or house soiling, you could enlist the advice of a suitable pet behaviour counsellor. Most vets should be able to refer you to one of these locally or contact:

Association of Pet Behaviour Councillors

PO Box 46 Worcester WR8 9YS

Tel: 01386 751151 Fax: 01386 750743

E-mail: apbc@petbcent.demon.co.uk

For ease of reading this leaflet, the cat has been referred to as a 'he'. Spraying is typical of male cats but occasionally seen in females.

Carol Price is a specialist writer on pets for many national publications and an animal behaviourist with a particular interest in feline behaviour and psychology. We would like to thank her for writing this leaflet.



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