

MONTGOMERY COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER

PET BEHAVIOR AND TRAINING SERVICES, INC.

LITTER PAN PROBLEMS IN CATS

Written by Pet Behavior and Training Services, Inc. for use by the Montgomery County Animal Shelter

Approximately 10% of pet cats have a behavior problem involving elimination outside of the of the litter pan. A common factor in many cases of inappropriate elimination is the cat's dislike of the litter provided. Often the cat that doesn't like your choice of litter will fail to dig, cover and bury his urine or feces. He may stand on the edge of the pan to avoid touching the litter. If he does touch the litter you may see him shake his paws or run quickly out of the pan.

Sometimes the cat will begin to eliminate on carpet or throw rugs because the litter pan was dirty, or the pan was changed to one with a cover. He may continue to use the carpet or rug even after the pan is cleaned or the cover removed. He may have developed a habit or a liking for the location or surface he is eliminating on. For this reason, just correcting the reason he stopped using the pan may not correct the problem.

THE GENERAL STRATEGY FOR CORRECTING LITTER PAN PROBLEMS

Health

First determine if there is an underlying medical problem. Straining, frequent or small amounts of urine, or vocalizing while eliminating may be a sign of urinary problems. If your cat has consistently used the box then begins to use other areas or exhibits any of the above symptoms, visit your veterinarian.

Litter Material

Many times, using plain clay with no deodorants works best. Adding a little potting soil to the litter can make the litter highly attraction to some cats.

Many cats prefer clumping sand litter. Providing the cat with a choice of these different types of litter will allow him to demonstrate which litter he prefers.

Scooping and Cleaning the Pan

Cats are drawn back to odor, but if the odor gets too strong, they will often pick another area. Scoop the pan daily and change the clay litter every five days. Many of the clumping sand litters advertise that only new litter needs to be added to the pan as old litter is scooped away. We recommend that even this type of litter be completely changed every 10 to 14 days. Such cleaning is a small price to pay for the cat's use of the litter pan. Remember that many cats don't like deodorants or disinfectants; wash the pan with only hot water. Don't spray the room where the cat's pan is with air freshener or use a plug-in air freshener near the pan.

Location of Pans

1. The location of the cat's pan is very important. Make sure it is not in a noisy or heavy traffic area. An older cat may not find it easy to climb stairs in order to use his litter box. Some cats do not like to urinate and defecate in the same pan. Try providing the cat with two pans.
2. If more than one cat lives in the home, additional pans should be provided. Some cats do not like to use the same pan other cats do, or may be intimidated by the presence of another cat near the pan. A general rule of thumb is one pan per cat and one extra. Pans should not be placed side by side. Spread them out and have at least one in a different room.

Cleaning Soiled Areas in the Home

It is important that any soiled areas in the house be thoroughly cleaned. The smell will attract the cat to relieve himself in that spot again. There are several good products on the market designed for this purpose.

Punishment is not effective in stopping litter pan problems. It may result in the cat developing a strong dislike for his pan or even fear of you.

Many cat behavior problems can be treated successfully, often with only a small amount of effort on your part. Other times they may require the help of your veterinarian or a pet behavior specialist.

If you need more help, you may call us for an individual appointment at 937-293-5686. If you live outside the area contact your veterinarian for the name of a pet behavior specialist in your area.

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A non-profit organization specializing in the behavior of pets

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