

MONTGOMERY COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER

PET BEHAVIOR AND TRAINING SERVICES, INC.

URINE MARKING OR SPRAYING BEHAVIOR IN CATS

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

Cats that are urinating while standing with their tails straight up are urine marking. The urine is sprayed horizontally, usually on vertical surfaces such as walls, drapes or the sides of furniture. Both male and female cats can spray. Neutered cats of both sexes can spray.

When your cat sprays, it is usually doing so because of territorial, aggressive or competitive behavior. Punishment or rewards are not effective in stopping spraying behavior. Lowering or removing the motivator for spraying is far more effective. In order to remove the motivation for spraying, it is necessary to understand what things may trigger urine marking.

Some cats spray because outside cats are present. If outside cats are stimulus for your cat's spraying behavior, it will be necessary to get rid of the outdoor cats (easier said than done), or prevent your cat from seeing, hearing or smelling them. If your cat is responding to outside cats only in one area in your home, then it might help to deny him access to that area. If that is not possible, closing the drapes at specific windows or using translucent material over the windows so that the outside cats cannot be seen, but light can filter through. If the outside cats have sprayed areas of your house, dousing these areas with vinegar water should help mask the odor.

The presence of other cats in your household can also cause marking behavior near the litter pan area. Some cats may not like to eliminate where other cats do or may be intimidated by the presence of another cat near the litter pan. Many times such competition creates a situation where one cat begins spraying that area as a way of establishing its territory. Often, providing several litter pans and separate food and water dishes in different areas are enough to allow peace to reign.

If your cat is spraying in only one or two areas in the home, it might work to place his food, water and/or toys around those areas in hope that feeding and playing in that location will inhibit spraying. This will not help if his motivation to spray is high. He will probably spray in a new location.

Yelling, hitting or squirting with water will not stop the marking behavior. Any punishment is likely to make your cat afraid of you or perhaps spray more frequently.

It is important that any soiled areas in the house be thoroughly cleaned. There are several products on the market designed for this purpose. After the spots have been thoroughly cleaned, it will help to spray a little straight white vinegar or a citrus spray several times a day on the spots to mask any remaining odor. These are my favorites. Or you might want to try Feliway, a cat facial pheromone, instead of vinegar or citrus spray. Ask your veterinarian for more information and the appropriate use of Feliway.

Your cat should receive one period each day with you that is designated as his “special time”. What is critical is that the session should be about the same time each day, preferable in the evening when things have quieted down. The session need only be about ten minutes, but should include the greatest joys of his life – his special treats, special games and quiet petting. He will quickly learn to anticipate the special period. At this point, any frustrations or competition that he experiences will be eased.

Many cat behavior problems can be treated successfully. Sometimes the above suggestions are all that is needed. Other times, your veterinarian or a pet professional will need a complete history of your cat and household.

If you need more help, contact your veterinarian or you may call us for an appointment. If you live outside the area, ask your veterinarian for the name of a pet specialist in your area.

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A non-profit organization specializing in the behavior of pets

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