

GUIDELINE BRIEFS

AAFP/ISFM HOUSE-SOILING GUIDELINES



CALL IT WHAT IT IS: HOUSE-SOILING

Using the term house-soiling versus inappropriate elimination removes the stigma of misbehavior. The house-soiling location IS appropriate for the cat based on their current needs and emotions. Using the term house-soiling focuses on the action that is happening rather than labeling the cat's behavior as inappropriate. It also teaches caregivers that house-soiling needs to be managed and allows for veterinary professionals to provide guidance and support.



FOUR CAUSES

(One Cat May Have More Than One Cause)

- Medical - Rule out and treat medical causes first! Urinary obstruction can lead to death within 48 hours.
- Feline Idiopathic Cystitis (FIC)
- Marking behavior
- Social and environmental factors



THERAPEUTIC OPTIONS

- First, optimize the environment and litter box
- As a last resort, choose drugs that have been proven to be beneficial, if needed as an adjunct therapy, and use in conjunction with environmental management (see House-soiling Guidelines)



#1 WAY TO PREVENT AND MANAGE HOUSE-SOILING: OPTIMIZE THE LITTER BOX

- Large enough (minimum size 15" x 34") with easy access
- 1 per cat + 1 extra in separate, safe locations throughout the home
- Use a litter that the cat prefers (usually unscented clumping litter)
- Scoop urine and stool daily
- Wash every 1-4 weeks using only soap and water
- Avoid trying to mask litter box odors with alternative smells
- Avoid any negative associations with the litter box



ADDRESS SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS OF ALL CASES

- Educate caregivers that house-soiling is a cry for help that we can answer
- Provide safe and separate resources including both floor level and elevated options: 1 per cat + 1 extra
- Encourage play or other activities the cat finds pleasant
- Consider pheromone usage especially in marking cases
- Determine possible avoidance issues (e.g., litter box in high traffic or locations with loud noise)
- Cat-to-cat relationships may influence how cats use litter boxes (e.g., overcrowding in multi-cat households, litter box being blocked by another cat)

Feline Resources: How Many Do I Need?

One per cat, plus one extra, in separate locations.



- ✓ Safe resting place
- ✓ Scratching post
- ✓ Litter box
- ✓ Food bowl
- ✓ Water bowl
- ✓ Three dimensional space

The Ideal Litter Box

Cats are fastidious by nature and do not favor a soiled box. The design and management of the litter box are critical for encouraging acceptable toileting habits. When house-soiling occurs, always evaluate the litter box.



Images courtesy of Heather O'Steen, Kari Mundschenk, and Vicky Halls (respectively)

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NUMBER OF BOXES

Provide one per cat, plus one additional box. A household of three cats should have at least four litter boxes.

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LOCATION LOCATION LOCATION

Place the litter boxes in multiple locations in the house, not side by side. Have at least one box on each floor of a multi-level house. Avoid moving boxes around the house.

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KEEP IT CLEAN

Scoop litter once or twice daily. More often is best. Empty out litter box once every 1-4 weeks. Wash box with mild detergent, rinse well, and dry before adding new litter.

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SIZE MATTERS

Bigger litter boxes are always better. The minimum size for an adult cat is 15" x 34". Make it large enough for cat to feel comfortable when moving around in it. Some cats may prefer boxes with low walls or a low door cut in the box.

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LITTER DEPTH

Experiment with litter depth. Most cats prefer 1-1.5" but some prefer deeper litter. Add a new litter box if attempting to try different litter depths or types. Note the depth which most cats prefer and use this for most of the boxes.

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NEGATIVE ASSOCIATIONS

Keep litter boxes away from rooms that contain noisy equipment such as washing machines and furnaces. The noises may frighten the cat. Avoid giving medications or doing something else unpleasant to your cat when they are near or using the litter box.

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USE LITTER A CAT PREFERS

Most cats prefer play (sandbox) sand or unscented clumping litter. Scented litters can be unpleasant or even painful because a cat's sense of smell is significantly more sensitive than a human's. Some healthy cats accept newer "natural" litters (corn, wheat, etc.) but won't tolerate them when unwell or experiencing anxiety or stress.

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DON'T SOIL WHERE YOU EAT

Keep food and water dishes in a separate room or more than five feet away from the litter boxes.

Access the House-soiling Guidelines at catvets.com/house-soiling and cat caregiver resources at catfriendly.com/house-soiling.