

## POINTS TO PAWNDER SERIES

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### The “Scoop” On Litter Box Problems

If your cat has stopped using his or her litter box, don't rush to get rid of him or her! More often than not, there are legitimate, easily correctible issues that have caused a cat to stop using the litter box. By taking a closer look at your cat's environment, you should be able to identify the factors that may have started the problem, and make simple changes that will encourage your cat to start using the box again.

#### Reasons Your Cat May Have Stopped Using The Litter Box

##### Cats Stop Using The Box For Legitimate, Easily Correctible Issues



- **Urinary Tract Infection**
  - One of the most common reasons cats stop using their litter boxes is urinary tract infections (UTI's). Cats are prone to developing UTI's, which make it extremely painful for the cat to urinate. Often, the cat will associate the pain with the litter box and look for somewhere else to go. If your cat stops using his or her litter box, it's important that you take them to a veterinarian, as UTI's can be dangerous if left untreated.
- **Other Causes**
  - If your cat has stopped using the litter box and your vet has ruled out a UTI, it's time to begin your detective work. Your cat may have decided the litter box is an unpleasant place to eliminate if:
    - The box is not clean enough;
    - She's been startled by a noise while using the box;
    - She's been ambushed while using the box by another cat, a child, a dog, or you trying to catch her; or
    - Changes or stimuli in the household are causing anxiety.

#### How To Encourage Your Cat To Use The Litter Box

##### See Your Veterinarian

- See your veterinarian to make sure your cat doesn't have a UTI or other health issue that's causing her to not use the box.

##### Keep The Litter Box Clean & Sterilize Any “Accident” Areas

- Cats can be quite particular about the cleanliness of their box, so it's important to keep it clean. If you can smell the box, you can be sure it's offensive to your cat as well.
- Scoop at least once a day and completely change the litter every 4 – 5 days. If using scoopable litter, you may not need to change the litter as frequently, but this will depend on the number of cats in the household, the size of the cats, and the number of litter boxes you have.
- Some cats prefer to urinate in one box and defecate in another, so you need to pay attention to your cat's preference and provide the proper number of boxes. If

you have multiple cats, it's best to provide one litter box for each cat.

- Thoroughly clean any areas where your cat has had an "accident," so she won't be tempted to use the area again. Cover the area with an upside-down carpet runner or aluminum foil, place citrus-scented cotton balls over the area, place a litter box in the area, and/or place water bowls in the area (cats often don't like to eliminate near where they eat or drink).

### Use The Right Litter & Box

- Cats can be very particular about the type of litter and box they prefer. Remember, the only way your cat can tell you they don't like the litter, the box, or that it's too dirty is to stop using it!
- **The Right Litter**
  - If your cat is used to one brand of litter, don't change brands!
  - It's best to use unscented litter and clean it more frequently. This is because, while you may prefer scented litter, most cats find the odor offensive.
- **The Right Litter Box**
  - Provide an uncovered AND covered box for your cat. While you may prefer a covered box so you don't see the mess, your cat may not like being confined in such a small space.
  - Large or obese cats, and small kittens, may find it difficult to get in and out of a covered box.

### Put The Litter Box In The Proper Location

- Put your cat's litter box in a quiet place where your cat can have privacy. A common mistake many cat owners make is putting the box in a basement or utility room, forcing their cat to go to the bathroom in an area with noisy appliances (furnaces, washers and dryers) that frighten the cat.
- Make sure you have litter boxes on every level of your house, so your cat is never far from one when nature calls. Not being able to urinate when necessary can cause your cat to develop a dangerous UTI.

### Reduce Your Cat's Anxiety

- Cats don't handle changes in their daily routines well.
  - Changes can cause stress to your cat and abnormal litter box habits. If there's been stress in your cat's life (e.g., new family member, move into new home, new pet):
    - Spend extra time with your cat.
    - Make sure your cat has a quiet room to retreat to.
    - Close blinds while you're gone, so your cat can't see outside.

### Don't Punish Your Cat For Accidents

- **Don't punish your cat for eliminating outside the litter box.** Cats don't stop using their litter boxes because they're upset at their owners. Because animals don't act out of spite or revenge, it won't help to punish your cat. It will only make your cat terrified of you, stressed, and more inclined to have accidents.

### Suggested Reading

- San Francisco SPCA, "Litterbox Basics (Prevention and Cure)" [http://www.sfspca.org/behavior/cat\\_library/litterbox-basics.pdf](http://www.sfspca.org/behavior/cat_library/litterbox-basics.pdf)
- Denver Dumb Friends League, "Starting Out Right With Your New Cat And The Litter Box" [http://www.ddfl.org/behavior/lbox\\_prob\\_prev.htm](http://www.ddfl.org/behavior/lbox_prob_prev.htm)

**Important Note:** Indiana-PAW's POINTS TO PAWNDER SERIES is intended to provide quick tips to help citizens address common pet health and behavior questions. It is not intended to replace consultation with one's veterinarian and/or a trained behavior specialist.