

## How To Prevent Litter Box Problems



(Copywrite: Ingrid King at [www.consciouscat.net](http://www.consciouscat.net))

There is nothing as distressing for a cat owner as having a cat that eliminates outside the litter box. It's also one of the most common reasons why cats are returned to shelters.

The reasons why cats eliminate outside the litter box vary, and include litter box aversion, urine marking, hormonal problems, and **medical issues\***. When faced with inappropriate elimination (and this can be urine as well as feces), a thorough veterinary exam should always be the first step.

There are quite a few things owners can do to prevent litter box problems from happening in the first place, and the first step is to understand what cats want when it comes to their litter boxes. While some cats may be particularly fussy and need to have their bathroom preferences catered to in special ways, there are common errors that many cat owners, especially those new to cats and their needs, tend to make. These include:

**(\*Important: Make sure that your cat has been examined for bladder infections or other medical problems if there are litter box issues! Shelters are not able to treat every pet for every possible medical issue that the pet may have. In addition, the stress of having been in a shelter environment can create temporary medical problems that did not exist previously. – R.P.)**



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### **Too few boxes?**

The rule of thumb is that you should have as many boxes as you have cats, plus one extra. This may mean that even if you only have one cat, you may need to have two litter boxes. This is especially important in multi-level homes.

### **The wrong location?**

Humans tend to want litter boxes out of sight, so they often end up in laundry or utility rooms or in dark corners of the basement. This may be fine for many cats, but it can cause problems if the area is not quiet. If the litter box is placed next to a noisy washer or dryer, or a furnace, and if the appliance starts up just as your cat is doing her business, she may never use that box again. Good spots for litter boxes are bathrooms, or a quiet room that isn't used much.

### **The wrong type of litter?**

There have never been as many choices of cat litters as there are now. Unfortunately, many of the litters are designed more with the human in mind than the cat. There is no perfect litter – each type has its advantages and its drawbacks. Most cats prefer a sandy substrate like clumping clay litter. While some cats readily accept some of the more environmentally friendly litters such as pine, wheat or corn, others will simply refuse to use a box containing those products.

Never use scented litters or scented litter deodorizers. Cats sense of smell is far more sensitive than ours, and the overpowering scent of these litters can be a big turn off for them.



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### **Not enough litter?**

Keep at least 2-3 inches of litter in the box at all times – add fresh litter after you scoop out waste to maintain this level. Most cats like to scratch and bury what they produce, and they will get frustrated when there's not enough litter

to allow them to do that.

### **The box is too dirty?** *(This is a problem I see all too often!) – R.P.*

Scoop the box at least twice a day and remove all urine and feces waste. This is only possible with clumping litter. If you use a non-clumping litter, you should discard the entire content of the box whenever there is waste in it, and replace with fresh litter. If you use clumping litter, you should replace the entire litter about once a month.

### **The box is "too clean"?**

Don't use harsh chemical cleaners to clean the litter box. All you really need to use is hot water and some mild, unscented dish soap. Let the box dry thoroughly before you replace litter. If you feel you must "sanitize" your box, use some bleach and hot water, but be sure to rinse thoroughly with hot water to eliminate any remnants of the scent of bleach.

### **Cat Box liners?**

Most cats don't like liners. They don't like the crinkly sound the plastic makes when they walk on it, nor do they like the way it feels under their paws.

Graphic: dreamstime.com

For more information go to: [www.consciouscat.net](http://www.consciouscat.net)