



NORTHPARK Animal Hospital

INAPPROPRIATE ELIMINATION DISORDERS

What is “inappropriate elimination”?

This is a term that means that a cat is urinating and/or defecating in the house but not in the litter box.

What causes it?

After medical causes of these problems have been ruled out, the source of the problem is considered a behavioral disorder. Behavioral causes of inappropriate elimination fall into two general categories: 1) a dislike of the litter box, and 2) stress-related misbehavior.

Why would a cat not like its litter box?

One of the main reasons for this is because the litter box has become objectionable to the cat. This usually occurs because it is not cleaned frequently enough or because the cat does not like the litter in it. The latter is called substrate aversion; it can occur because the litter was changed to a new, objectionable type or because the cat just got tired of the old litter.

What stresses can cause inappropriate elimination?

There are probably hundreds of these, but the more common ones are as follows:

- a) A new person (especially a baby) in the house
- b) A person that has recently left the house (permanently or temporarily)
- c) New furniture
- d) New drapes
- e) New carpet
- f) Rearrangement of the furniture
- g) Moving to a new house
- h) A new pet in the house
- i) A pet that has recently left the house
- j) A new cat in the neighborhood that can be seen by the indoor cat
- k) A cat in “heat” in the neighborhood
- l) A new dog in the neighborhood that can be heard by the indoor cat

I feel that this is a problem that cannot be tolerated, even if the cat has to leave my house. Is that wrong?

No. Many people are very proud of their home and feel that way.

Can the problem be treated?

Yes, in most cases. However, the treatment is more likely to be successful if several of the following are true:

- a) The duration is less than one month when treatment begins
- b) There are only one or two locations in the house that the cat uses for inappropriate elimination
- c) It is possible to identify and relieve the stress-causing situation
- d) It is possible to neutralize the odor caused by the urine or stool
- e) You have only one cat

What is involved with treatment?

Most successful treatments rely on a combination of behavior modification techniques and drug therapy.

What are behavior modification techniques, and how are they used?

They can be described as **Aversion Therapy** and **Attraction Therapy**. The former repels the cat from the inappropriate location, and the latter encourages the cat to choose an appropriate location.

The purpose of **Aversion Therapy** is to make the area of inappropriate urination or defecation undesirable for the cat. There are many ways to do this, but the following steps have proven successful in a high percentage of cases.

- A.** A product to neutralize the odor of urine or stool should be used in places where inappropriate urination or defecation has occurred. If the objectionable location is on a carpet, it is necessary to treat the carpet and the pad below because most of the odor will be in the pad. This usually means soaking the carpet with the neutralizing product so it penetrates into the pad. Test an inconspicuous piece of carpet for staining before using any odor-neutralizing product.
- B.** Cover the area(s) with aluminum foil and secure it to the carpet or furniture with masking tape. Aluminum foil is a surface on which most cats do not like to walk.
- C.** If the soil in potted plants is being used, place a lemon-scented air freshener at the base of the plant. This will usually repel the cat.

The purpose of **Attraction Therapy** is to make the litter box more desirable than the inappropriate site. The following are usually successful:

- A.** Purchase a new litter box; even well cleaned litter boxes have odor deep in the plastic. It is important not to use a litter box with a hood. Although we like our privacy, most cats find a hooded litter box undesirable.
- B.** Purchase non-scented clumping litter. If your cat has not been using this type of litter, it will usually find it more desirable than the clay types. This will increase the chances of your cat using the new litter box.
- C.** Place the new litter box near the area of inappropriate urination until it is used for several days, and then move it 2-3 feet (0.7-1 m) per day back to the desired location.

- D.** Keep the existing litter box in the normal location in case the aversion therapy causes your cat to return to it.

What drugs are used?

There are several that have been used. Generally, they fall into three categories:

- A.** Anti-depressant and/or anti-anxiety medication (amitriptyline, buspirone)
- B.** Tranquilizers, including diazepam and phenobarbital
- C.** Hormones, including megestrol acetate and medroxyprogesterone acetate

Are these drugs approved for use in cats?

No. All of these were developed for use in humans. However, most have been used on enough cats to give us reason to believe that they are very safe.

I understand that buspirone has gained popularity recently. What is this drug?

Buspirone (trade name Buspar®) is an anti-anxiety drug prescribed by physicians; it is a human drug, not a veterinary drug, although it has been used safely in cats for several years. Buspirone has been shown to be effective in a significant number of cats with elimination behavior problems.

What is its success rate?

Its success rate is not 100% but, for the intended purpose, it has been shown to be more effective than many of the other drugs.

How is buspirone dosed?

The following outline should be followed. If the sequence is not clear, please call for further instructions.

- 1.** Give 5 mg (1 tablet) twice daily for 1 week
 - a.** If there is no response, give 7.5 mg (1 1/2 tablets) twice daily for one week
 - If there is no response, discontinue buspirone.
 - If there is good response, give 5 mg twice daily for 8 weeks.
 - b.** If there is good response, give 5 mg twice daily for 8 weeks.
- 2.** If a relapse occurs after successful therapy, resume buspirone at a dose of 5 - 7.5 mg twice daily and continue for 6-12 months.