

## Reducing Urine-Marking Behavior in Cats

It's important to distinguish the difference between urine-marking behavior and house soiling because the solutions differ for these two behaviors.

### Marking

Cats generally mark with urine on vertical surfaces; cats rarely mark with feces. Cats are extremely territorial and marking is one way they communicate. What are they saying? Well, it depends on the situation, but one thing is for sure...cats aren't shy about claiming their territory. They may mark on something new brought into the home, an object that smells like the owner or the inside of a door or window in your home if they have detected cats outside. You will find that your cat is continuing to use the litter box if the issue is marking.

### House soiling

If the problem is house soiling you'll notice the litter box isn't being used as much or at all. Any urine or feces will be on horizontal surfaces in one area or it could be in multiple areas and/or on furniture. In either case, we always recommend a visit to your veterinarian for an exam and a urinalysis to rule out anything medical as the root cause.

The longer the marking has been going on the harder it is to correct, so don't delay. If you have multiple intact cats living together, it's time to schedule spay/neuter surgeries for them. Intact males and females are more likely to urine mark than those who have been spayed/neutered. However, even spayed/neutered cats can mark in response to intact cats. Sometimes spaying or neutering alone can resolve a marking problem unless it has become an established habit.

### Causes for marking

1. Disruption or any changes in your cat's routine. Cats generally do not like changes.
2. Anything that increases anxiety in a cat who may be anxious to begin with, such as a new animal in the home.
3. Upset by outdoor cats or conflicts with other pets in the home.
4. New objects in your home that smell unfamiliar.

### Solutions

1. Block visual access to windows where your cat can see outdoor cats.
2. Work to resolve any inner-pet conflicts in your home that may be driving this behavior.
3. Keep your cat indoors.
4. Thoroughly clean any marked areas with an enzymatic cleaner.
5. Feed, play, brush and interact with your cat in ways she enjoys in the areas where she was marking.
6. Move any objects that are likely marking targets out of the cat's reach.
7. Increase the time you spend with your cat.
8. Turn a new roommate, a visiting friend, or your new baby into the most positive creature ever for your cat. Create positive associations between the person and your cat. Anything that your cat loves to do or eat appears only when the new person is right there by the cat. If your cat is too nervous to get close, provide some distance and toss a treat or use a wand toy instead of a toy that requires closer proximity.
9. Interrupt your cat's sniffing behavior around areas where he has marked previously by clapping your hands or squirting him with water. It's better if he doesn't see the water coming from you because he'll avoid the area only when you're there. You could also lay down carpet strip with the pointy sides up in the area that your cat has been targeting.
10. Never punish your cat after the fact. It will confuse him, be ineffective and can damage your relationship with him  
*(continued on page 2).*

### **Debunking the out-of-spite myth**

No matter how much you want to believe it, **cats do not urinate or defecate out of spite or jealousy**. A cat who urinates on your boyfriend's jacket isn't voicing his opinion on your choice of men. He's sensing the presence of an intruder and communicating that this territory is spoken for.

To address your cat's marking behavior you **must first get to the root cause**. This will take some investigative skills. Keep a daily journal to make notes about when the behavior started, what else was happening in your home, where your cat is marking, when your cat usually marks, and the progress you're making, or lack thereof. It's easy for details and days to blur together when you're focusing so closely on a behavior plus trying to live your life, so keep using the journal.

**Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about your cat's behavior.  
Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.**