

Litter Box Avoidance: Not Always a Behavior Problem

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



The owner of Ricki, a five-year-old calico cat, woke up one morning to find Ricki had dug up one of her plants, leaving a mess on the living room carpet. The owner dismissed the behavior as simply a reaction to the stress of having company the previous day, but something just wasn't right...

The next day, however, Ricki had dug in the plant again, but this time, the owner smelled urine in the soil. Upon further inspection around the house, another spot of urine was found – this time on a rug in one of the bedrooms. Since Ricki had displayed no problems urinating outside her litter box previously, the owner began to suspect something was wrong.

Careful observation pays off...

She kept a close eye on Ricki all day, witnessing her squatting in her litter box many times and seeming to have difficulty urinating. When Ricki did go, she produced very little urine. At other times, Ricki eliminated in off-limits areas like a pile of laundry, a soft rug, and even on a sofa. Ricki also meowed in pain when picked up.

Getting help...

She brought Ricki in to the veterinary clinic right away and her veterinarian examined Ricki, suspecting she had a urinary problem. The veterinarian performed a urinalysis, which confirmed his suspicions: Ricki had a bacterial bladder infection.

Home again...

The veterinarian sent Ricki and her owner home with antibiotics, instructions to provide the cat with plenty of fresh water, and an appointment for a month later. When he performed a urinalysis at her next visit, Ricki's infection had cleared up. The owner also reported that Ricki was back to her lively self, eliminating in her litter box again, and eating and drinking normally.

Veterinary Perspective... (Factors Contributing to Inappropriate Elimination)

- **Medical Conditions:** Cats avoiding the litter pan should be examined by a veterinarian to rule out a medical condition. Laboratory tests will need to be performed in most cases, however, if a condition does exist, immediate treatment will help resolve the behavioral problem. Possible medical conditions include: colitis, inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), diabetes mellitus, hyperthyroidism, kidney or liver disease, or feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD). Medical conditions such as arthritis, FLUTD, anal sac disease, and some forms of colitis, which cause pain urinating or defecating may also result in inappropriate elimination.

- **Stress:** Cats of all ages experience stress at some point in their lives (just like us). [Stress](#) can be a major cause of inappropriate elimination, and known stressors such as moving, changes in routine, or changes within the family structure (new members added or family members leaving home) can result in inappropriate elimination. Reducing these stressors or decreasing their impact on the household will benefit your cat and you, too.

- **Box Location & Contents:** Some cats may not like where their box is located; too close to their food or water, in a high traffic area, or on a different level of the house than where they spend most of their time. Some cats are very particular and will not defecate in the same box in which they urinate or go into a box which has been used by another cat. Most cats do not like a dirty litter box. Clean out waste from their litter boxes at least once daily, and wash the litter boxes weekly so that they don't decide to eliminate elsewhere in your home.

Our Doctors' Recommendations

[Drs. Foster & Smith Urine Power Away](#) is perfect for getting rid of stains and odors effectively - eliminating them before they have a chance to become set-in and be permanently "attractive" to your cat. Leaves a pleasant scent as it attacks and kills the bacterial makeup of the waste products and can be used on any surface soiled by your cat.



[Drinkwell Pet Fountain](#)

Fresh water is vital for cat health and this fountain is perfect for getting your cats to drink more water daily ensuring proper hydration. Continuous flow of filtered water keeps water fresh and pure and is more appealing to your feline friend.



Enhance and Freshen Up Your Cat's Litter Box Area... Control Mess and Odors



Odor Crystals



Rollaway Litter Box



Comfort Zone® with Feliway® Spray