

# How to identify *inappropriate elimination* IN CATS

The first step in helping to solve litter box problems in cats is to carefully observe your cat's behaviors—even better, take short videos of your cat's basic behaviors, so when something changes, you can show your veterinarian what happened before and after the change.

Here are some questions to think about and discuss with your veterinarian:

- Q:** Does the cat leave urine or feces outside the litter box? If yes, where? \_\_\_\_\_
- Q:** Does the cat spray? If yes, where? \_\_\_\_\_
- Q:** Do you have concerns, complaints or problems with urination or defecation in the house?  
If yes, what location? \_\_\_\_\_  
How frequent is the inappropriate urination or defecation? \_\_\_\_\_  
What is the approximate time of day the event(s) occur (i.e., are you at home or away)? \_\_\_\_\_
- Q:** Does the cat exhibit vocalization about which you're concerned?  
If yes, what types of vocalization (e.g., yowling, growling, meowing, hissing), and when does the vocalization typically occur? \_\_\_\_\_
- Q:** Is the cat aggressive to people or other cats?

As with all behavior problems, the key to intervention lies in understanding the cat's perspective, which can be discerned by watching for changes in behavior. Identifying potential factors gets you and your veterinarian that much closer to addressing the cat's needs.

Factors that contribute to inappropriate elimination preferences and aversions include:

- > Frequently dirty litter or litter boxes
- > Litter boxes that are too small and discourage active digging and exploration
- > Litter boxes that are too high for cats to enter readily
- > Styles (e.g., covered) and placement (e.g., in closets) that allow the cat using the litter box to be trapped by a child, another cat, a dog, etc.
- > Placement of boxes in locations the cat can't reach because of pain (e.g., arthritis), access or social factors (e.g., being chased by a puppy)
- > Odor entrapment by lids of covered boxes placed in areas without adequate ventilation
- > Illness of another cat in the household that causes changes in bladder and bowel function.

Factors that contribute to marking behaviors generally are based on stressors such as:

- > Addition or loss of another pet in the household
- > Change in the composition of the human household
- > Change in the stress level of the household (e.g., illness, job change)
- > Visitation by an outside cat
- > Illness or change of relationships between cats in the household (e.g., concomitant with social maturity)
- > True inter-cat aggression.