

Avoiding the litter box

This can be maddening, but leave no stone unturned: Something has caused your cat's aversion to the box and you need to get her back on track:

Reasons for not using the box:

- Dirty box
- Poor location of box
- Box is covered or too small
- Unappealing litter material
- Sudden change in litter or box location
- Too few boxes for number of cats
- Unappealing cleanser used on box
- Move to new house or renovation/construction
- Disharmony with other pet(s)
- Arrival of another cat in the household
- Addition of new family member (spouse, stepchild, baby, grandmother, dog)
- Senior cat issues (discomfort getting into box, senility)
- General anxiety and fear
- Change in food or feeding schedule
- Change in owner's schedule; person less home
- Previous bad litter box experience (attacked by another cat midstream)
- Box is (or was) frighteningly close to a washing machine or furnace
- Negative association: pain during urination due to urinary condition

Cats are extremely clean animals. They are very cautious not to soil their living environment. Never think they act out of vindictiveness or revenge. They don't know these kind of feelings. Therefore, to scream and yell at them, stick their nose into urine or faeces or hit them, will achieve nothing apart from breaking your relationship with them. For them to go out of the litter box is an indication that something is irritating them badly.

As a first step always take your kitty to the vet to make sure, no health issues (urinary tract infection, constipation, inflammation of the intestine etc) are the cause.

If you notice that the stool is very dark and hard your kitty might suffer from constipation which makes relieving herself rather painful. This pain she might associate with the litter box and as such is trying to avoid the pain = litter box. Make sure, she drinks enough water.

- Try several water fountains. Running water could entice your kitty to drink more.
- Place food and water bowls in different locations
- Renew the water twice a day
- Add juicy wet food to her diet
- Add selfcooked pumpkin mouse (pumpkin enzyme is regulating diarrhoea as well as constipation!) to her wet food.

After this you can start looking into a probable **environmental cause**.



Find out if it is **marking** (the cat deliberately relieves herself in strategic places with no attempt to cover) or is it **relieving** (the cat is uncomfortable using the little box, using other places but tries to cover it)!

Even if you have **only one cat** you might need two litter boxes. Some cats prefer to use one litter box to urinate and the other one for the poo.

If you have **a multi-cat household** you might need up to one litter box per cat and an additional litter box to keep territorial threatening to a minimum.

So what else can you do? Here is a list of things you can try (not necessarily in that order):

- try different types of litter in different litter boxes and check if she has a preference (be careful with scented litter or odour powder!)
- try different litter box types (some cats feel safer in a closed one, or the box was too small)
- add additional litter boxes in different locations (use the whole place not only one room!)
- clean the litter boxes more often (more than twice per day!)
- change the location of the litter boxes (maybe too enclosed, too busy area)
- make sure the litter boxes are far away from food and water bowls
- have no toys, cat trees or scratch poles near a litter box
- use lemon scented cleaner in the areas where you don't want your kitty to install her toilette
- place plastic covers (the once you can buy for painting jobs), an upside down carpet protection mat with nobs upside, Alu foil, mattress protector covers (e.g. from IKEA), a shower curtain etc between the sofa/bed/etc and the blanket. The sound and feel of the plastic might discourage your cat to use this place (in the worst case, the sofa is protected and can be cleaned easily)
- praise the cat when it is using her litter box (maybe even with a treat)
- make sure no kids and no other cats disturb your kitty while doing her business
- if the cat uses the sink or bath tub, fill the sink or the bath tub a few centimetres with water
- use the areas where your cat soiled for play and feeding treats (she will make a positive association and will try to keep these areas clean)
- after thorough cleaning leave treats where she has had done business (hopefully she will avoid to soil areas where she can find food)

If you tried all of the above and more and no change is showing, you might need to lock your kitty into the bathroom for a day or two to retrain the instinct to keep her immediate environment clean