

## Litter Box: Friend or Foe?

Written by HHS Team

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Cats are well known for being fairly easy to train to use a litter box. It is a natural thing for cats, but what do you do when your cat suddenly stops using the box and begins using your floor or furniture as an alternative? The first thing to look for are changes that could be stressing your cat. There is always a reason why a cat that was trained to use the box suddenly stops. Maybe you have brought a new animal into the home, maybe you have relatives staying over, maybe you have changed the brand of litter, or maybe the box was just dirty when the cat went to use it.

Litter boxes should be cleaned at least once a day. A good rule of thumb is that you should have one litter box per cat in your household. If you have multiple cats it might also be that you need litter boxes in multiple places. If you have a multi-story house, make sure that you have a litter box on each floor. If your cat has stopped using the box, discard all of the litter daily and be sure to clean the box thoroughly with water before adding new litter. A little lemon juice or vinegar can be used to wipe the empty box down. Never use any ammonia based cleaners as this makes the box smell "dirty" to the cat and they will often refuse to use it.

Some kitties are also sensitive to specific litters. Clay-based litters are usually preferred by our most "picky litter" cats, but if there was a litter change that coincided with the refusal to go to the box, go back to your previous litter. You should always make litter changes very slowly for cats, as some of them can be very sensitive about it. Any areas in the home that the cat has used instead of their box need to be cleaned thoroughly with an enzyme cleaner to eliminate the temptation of using the spot again. You will also need to confine your cat in a room with its litter box for "reprogramming". For some cats that merely takes keeping them in the room with the box for a day or so; others can take weeks. As you gradually give your kitty more freedom, make sure that you keep a close eye on him or her. We don't want any new accidents during the retraining period.

There can also be medical reasons why kitties suddenly stop using their boxes, so if there have been no changes in the cat's routine and you have tried everything else, make sure to take your feline for a check-up, as they may have acquired an infection which requires medical attention. If you are still having issues with litter-box training, please contact us and one of our behavioral trainers can work with you to solve the problem!