



Feline Urine Marking

- Feline urine marking is a normal form of communication between cats. It is usually related to stress. Cats do not typically use urine marking to claim territorial boundaries.
- Urine marking occurs most commonly in male cats that have not been neutered.
- A cat that is urine marking typically stands upright with its tail erect and sprays a small amount of liquid on walls and other vertical surfaces. However, other postures may be seen.
- A diagnosis is made once other medical and behavioral reasons for urinating outside the litterbox have been ruled out. If a cat has learned to urinate outside the litterbox due to a medical issue, behavior modification will be needed in addition to medical treatment.
- Neutering or spaying the cat is the most effective initial treatment.
- Other treatment includes methods to reduce stress in the cat's environment. Medication can be added if your veterinarian feels it is necessary.

What Is Feline Urine Marking?

Feline urine marking is a behavior in which cats mark a location with urine to reduce their stress. Often, it occurs near doors and windows as a way to communicate to neighborhood tomcats wandering through the yard. Although this is a normal behavior in cats, most owners consider it unacceptable when it occurs in the house. Any cat can exhibit marking behaviors, but male cats that have not been neutered tend to mark more often. Urine marking is most often seen in multicat households.

Although sex hormones may be behind some urine marking, stress and anxiety also are causes. Any changes in the household, such as the addition of other pets, workers in the house, or a recent vacation by the owner, may compel the cat to become stressed and urine mark.

What Are the Signs of Urine Marking?

A cat that is urine marking typically stands upright with its tail erect and sprays a

small amount of liquid on walls and other vertical surfaces. However, other postures may be seen, and marking cats may spray on horizontal surfaces or items, such as bedding or laundry.

How Is Urine Marking Diagnosed?

Your veterinarian will probably want to check a urine sample to make sure that your cat doesn't have a medical reason for urinating outside the litterbox. If the urinary tract is inflamed, infected, or irritated by urinary crystals, there are treatments that can relieve the signs and encourage the cat to return to the litterbox. Some other medical conditions, such as bladder stones, hyperthyroidism, diabetes, and kidney or liver disease, also can cause a cat to urinate outside the litterbox. Your veterinarian may recommend additional tests, such as blood work and x-rays, to investigate these and other possibilities.

There may be other reasons why your cat is eliminating outside the litterbox.



Feline Urine Marking *continued*

The most effective initial treatment for urine marking is to neuter or spay your cat, if it has not been done already.

Cats are fastidious creatures, and may avoid the box if it is not clean enough, if they don't like the scent or texture of the litter, or if the box is located near a high traffic area in the house.

Once other causes of inappropriate elimination are ruled out, a diagnosis of feline urine marking may be made.

How Is Urine Marking Treated?

The most effective initial treatment for urine marking is to neuter or spay your cat, if it has not been done already. However, once the behavior has been learned, behavior modification may be needed even after neutering or treatment for a medical disorder.

Reducing stress in the cat's environment may also help. Ask your

veterinarian or a member of the veterinary staff who specializes in behavior for recommendations on resources to help you understand what may be causing your cat stress. Synthetic pheromone products (e.g., Feliway) are available in spray or plug-in diffuser forms. These products have a calming effect on many cats and may reduce the cat's response to stressors.

To discourage neighborhood cats from approaching doors and windows, consider using a spray deterrent that is activated by motion detectors. You also should supply your cat a place to escape from children or other pets in the household, such as a room, cubby, or perch. Anti-anxiety medications may be appropriate in some cases. ■



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