



## NORTH AVENUE ANIMAL HOSPITAL, P.C.

---

1901 W. North Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60622  
(773) 278-1330

### Cats with Elimination Disorders

The steps below are designed to help resolve substrate and location preferences, as well as substrate and location aversions that are commonly experienced by cats. These steps are intended to help reinforce a cat's appropriate litter box use. Remember that the feline social system may also affect the behavior of a cat that is not using the litter box. It is recommended that you first look for any changes in lifestyle and around the house (new people, objects, and move, ect.) that might be causing the shift in behavior in your pet. Consult your veterinarian with your findings and they can help you form a plan to correct the problem.

1. **All affected areas must be cleaned** with an odor eliminator specifically designed to eliminate the feline urine odor.
2. **After cleaning , cover affected areas** with heavy-gauge plastic both to change the tactile sensation for the cat and prevent further penetration in the event of elimination. Usually, thick garbage bags that have been doubled-up will work for this.
3. **Use multiple litter boxes**, generally one more than there are cats (so one per cat and then one extra) unless there are more than five cats; large numbers of cats may render the stimulus too strong. These litter boxes should be placed in a variety of locations and be of a variety of styles (open, covered, deep, shallow, small, large, manual and automatic). Sometimes finding the right kind of box for your cat will solve the problem. Also, some boxes are treated with a pheromone chemical to make them more appealing to your cat.
4. **Litter should be scooped daily**, and most litters should be dumped totally every other day. The exceptions to this are the newer, "clumpable" litters; these do not have to be discarded as frequently, but do need to be "topped-up". Cats differ in their preference for litter depth. Boxes should be washed weekly. Some old boxes may be so permeated with scent that they should be discarded. It is not a bad idea in most cases to replace the entire box every other year (the exception being automatic litter boxes).
5. **A variety of litter should be offered** to the cat in a variety of boxes. If the cat is using soft substances, consider softer litters: No. 3 Blasting sand, playground sand, shredded newspaper, toweling/rags, sawdust, or woodchips (not cedar) may all be used in place of granule litter. Many clients are having luck with recyclable clumping litters with excellent results. Be creative and persistent. Consider trying one of the new trays where urine passes through rocks onto a pad below. Watch the cat and find out what works. Use this information to plot your strategy. Keep in mind that some cats prefer very little or not litter at all.
6. **Cats are not trained to litter boxes**; this is a behavior that develops in the absence of human intervention as kittens. Accordingly, a cat with an elimination problem cannot be trained to use a litter box; however, it can be encouraged to use a specific substrate by taking the cat to the litter box frequently, waiting with it, and praising it when it uses the box.

7. **Punishment works ONLY** if the cat is startled in the first 30-60 seconds of elimination behavior (that includes circling, facial expressions and digging) and the startle effect has to be sufficient to make them cease the behavior and leave. If the cat is observed squatting outside the box, foghorns, water pistols, whistles and tins of pennies all work with some cats. Other safe noisemakers (non-explosive) can be used successfully. Physical punishment, including rubbing the cat's nose in the soiled area, is useless after the fact and is potentially dangerous to the owner and the cat.
8. **Some cats may need to be confined** to a restricted area at first. If you do this, make sure the cat has the same choice of litters and boxes mentioned previously and that you give much attention to the cat during its confinement. If the cat was very social beforehand, arrangements must be made to meet the cat's social needs (I.E. it should not be left alone for long periods of time and visits should be in excess of 15 minutes at a time). If the behavior of other cats in the household changes when one is isolated, this hints at a social problem that may need to be addressed as part of the elimination disorder. Access to the rest of the house can be expanded once the cat begins using the litter box appropriately in the confined area. Once the confinement is over, the area must be observed closely for any potential relapses or social pressures that could cause a relapse. A bell on the cat's collar can be helpful reminded that supervision is necessary. Gradually opening up areas of the house to the cat will help to reinforce their new behavior, but all boxes must be maintained as previously mentioned.
9. **Anti-anxiety medications** may help some cats that otherwise are unable to succeed in this program. Remember, if it is decided that medication could benefit your cat, you need to use it IN ADDITION to the behavior modification, NOT instead of it.
10. **KEEP TRYING!** By even looking at this information, it shows how much you care about your cat.

**Don't give up!**

## Checklist for Elimination Disorders

### **1. General**

- a. Scoop litter boxes daily.
- b. Dump litter as needed.
- c. Wash litter box once a week, use non-ammonia products, make sure the box is dried before adding litter.
- d. Clean all soiled areas with Odor Eliminator, repeat and cover with plastic to prevent soiling.
- e. Take the cat to the box often and praise gently for scratching or eliminating. If this scares your cat, find another way such as treats, to praise your cat.
- f. Provide one more little box than you have cats (1 cat = 2 boxes, 2 cats = 3 boxes, etc.).
- g. Try different litter types, depths and boxes.

### **2. Locations of improper elimination**

- a. Follow general guidelines.
- b. Place scent deterrent in the area (mint or deodorant soap, something with a safe but strong odor that your cat will dislike).
- c. Place food or water dishes on the spots.
- d. Place a litter box there.

### **3. Substrate**

- a. Follow general guidelines.
- b. Try at least 4 different types of litters.
- c. Try different box liners.
- d. Try covered versus open boxes and vice versa.
- e. Try different depths of litter, including no litter at all.

### **4. KEEP TRYING AND GOOD LUCK!!**