

Spraying Problems:

Spraying, or what is sometimes called marking, is when the cat backs up to an object and sprays a small amount of urine. The cat does not squat during this process but remains standing. The urine is deposited onto a vertical surface such as the side of a chair, curtain, door, wall, etc. If urine is deposited in a large puddle on the floor, then it is considered to be litter box aversion and not spraying. See our other web page on litter box training if your cat is squatting and depositing a puddle on the floor.

Both intact males and females can spray. In fact, it is almost a guarantee that an unaltered feline will spray, generally starting at the onset of sexual maturity (about 7 months). Male cats as well will start to spray as they become sexually mature (7 months). By getting your cat altered, you have an 80% chance of completely remedying the problem without taking further action! So start by getting your cat altered ASAP.

If an altered animal sprays, it is generally anxiety-related and can have several different causes. Anxiety can be created by situations such as moving into a new home, adding a new human family member (such as a new spouse, new boy/girlfriend, new baby, newly adopted child, etc.), adding a new pet, outside stray cats invading the territory, too high a feline population within the household itself, improper introduction of a new cat/pet, construction/remodeling in the household, aggression between cats in the household and so on. The solution lies in finding the source of anxiety and reducing it or eliminating it.

REDUCE HOUSEHOLD TENSION

Do address any cat aggression problems you have in the household. This can be a major source of anxiety for many cats. Provide more places to hide and climb (vertical cat condos -- floor to ceiling models are the best) and multiple feeding stations, so the cats do not have to confront each other in critical areas. Increase the cat in question's daily exercise. Exercise can help alleviate stress in cats just as it can in humans. If you have a multiple cat population in a small home, your house size may be too small to be mentally healthy for some of the cats. Consider reducing the number of cats that you have OR increase the cat's living space (attach a screened-in patio or a cat enclosure to your house).

REDUCE TERRITORIAL INTRUSION

Just reducing the stray cat population around your cat's home can greatly reduce your pet's anxiety. If you have un-owned stray cats roaming your neighborhood, take responsibility and trap the cats. Find them new homes or turn them into a local shelter. Try installing a product called a "Scarecrow" to keep unwanted feline visitors from parading through your yards. A "Scarecrow" is a motion-activated sprinkler. It will turn on a spray of water when it detects motion within a certain range. It is very effective in teaching cats (and other critters) to avoid your yard. If the cats invading your yard are owned, politely inform your neighbors that all cities in the Bay Area have a roaming at large law pertaining to pets. What that means is that all pets should be kept on the owner's property at all times unless leashed and accompanied by the owner. This law does include cats, not just dogs as many people think. If a cat is found on your property, owned or not, you do have the legal right to trap the animal and turn it into a local shelter. Other methods involve keeping your cat away from windows where he may be seeing the intruding cats. Close off doors in the house or try closing the blinds.

REGULAR PLAY AND EXERCISE

Do try to keep your cat on a regular daily schedule of play and socialization with you. Your pet needs to be able to count on regular, daily times when he can get attention/play/exercise from you. Again, avoid any type of punishment and consider using confinement until your pet adjusts to the new stressors in your household. In very difficult anxiety cases, you can consult your veterinarian for anti-anxiety medication.

BASIC TIPS:

TALK TO YOUR PET'S DOCTOR.

Do check with your veterinarian and have a full physical workup on your animal. There could be an existing medical problem that is aggravating the spraying issue. There are additional new anti-anxiety medications now on the market that may help your cat as well. Be forewarned though, giving your pet a pill will not remedy the entire problem. Medication must be used in conjunction with the other solutions on this site.

AVOID ANY TYPE OF PUNISHMENT including verbal scolding or physical punishment (don't even show your pet the spot later or rub its nose in it, etc.) Putting the cat outside will do NOTHING to fix the problem and may actually cause it to get worse, especially if the cause is related to stray cats roaming your neighborhood. Putting the cat outside will, of course, reduce urine damage to your household, but an outside cat does not live a long life.

FEEDING STATIONS

If your cat is spraying only in one area, you can try feeding your cat in that area. Most cats will not spray in an area that has a food source. Be warned that the cat may just start spraying somewhere else in the house as you have not addressed the underlying cause of spraying.

CLEAN, CLEAN, CLEAN!

Clean up all the urine markings with an enzyme cleaner (we recommend Anti-Icky Poo available at our Whole Pets store). Household cleaners will NOT take care of the minute amount of leftover scent that a cat will detect. If the cat has urinated on carpeting or fabric, make sure to soak the underlying carpet pad with enzyme cleaner as well. Try to find ALL the places where the cat may have sprayed and do a thorough cleaning job. If necessary, you may have to rent or buy a black light to find all the urine-damaged areas in the home.

CONFINEMENT – A CAT ROOM – TO LIMIT URINE DAMAGE

Confine the pet in question to a prepared "cat room" whenever you cannot watch it directly. This is mainly to limit damage in your home. The "cat room" can be a small bathroom, small office or even a large wire dog crate. It should contain a clean litter box in one corner with food, water, bedding, toys and a scratching post in the opposite corner. The advantage of using a wire dog crate is that it can be located in the living room or kitchen, so the cat does not feel so isolated from the family. Keep the cat in confinement when you are sleeping/ cooking/ eating/ at work, etc. If the cat will sit in your lap as you read or watch TV, great. But the second you cannot directly watch the cat, it goes back into its confinement area. When you do put your cat back into its confinement area, give him a teaspoon of wet food. This is so he does not think the confinement is punishment, but rather some place good as he gets a special treat there.

The cat does need to come out at least twice daily for exercise, social attention and daily brushing but returns to the confinement area when you cannot supervise the animal directly. Allow gradual freedom in the house if you have identified and reduced stressors that may be causing the spraying. If the cat can remain "clean", then allow a bit more freedom within the home environment.

FELIWAY

An over-the-counter product called Feliway can be purchased at major pet stores (or try an on-line search for the product.) It is a spray that consists of facial pheromones. Applied to commonly "marked" areas, it encourages the cat to use facial rubbings to mark territory rather than urine.

Follow the instructions carefully; it must be reapplied at regular intervals--often twice a day initially. The makers of Feliway write, "When cats rub their faces against a surface, they're not just doing it because it feels good. It actually leaves behind a 'positive' pheromone, which helps to comfort and reassure the cat whenever they smell it again. Additionally, cats will not use urine to 'mark' a place where they've deposited these pheromones. Feliway uses a synthetic form of these feel-good pheromones as a way to help stop cats from urine marking and scratching. It can also be sprayed on surfaces such as carriers, bedding, new furniture and more, to help reassure the cat in unfamiliar surroundings or situations."

Recommended Reading:

- **Starting from Scratch: How to Correct Behavior Problems in Your Adult Cat** – Pam Johnson Bennett
- **The Fastidious Feline: How to Prevent and Treat Litter Box Problems** – Patricia McConnell