

# Tips to stop your cat from spraying

Posted by Jennifer on October 7th, 2010



Did you adopt a new cat, and discover that he or she has been spraying? Perhaps your current cat suddenly started? Figuring out why a cat is spraying (territorially using urine to mark a surface) can take quite a bit of detective work, since unfortunately, cats don't speak human! Spraying once or twice a year isn't cause for concern, although it's not much fun to clean up. But if your cat sprays more than once a week, you have a behavior that could soon become a hard-to-break habit. But don't worry, just read on for our step-by-step tips for stopping your cat from spraying.

First, it can help if you know the difference between spraying, and a cat who is going to the bathroom outside their litter box. **Spraying** (by a male or female cat) is when they "spray" their urine onto a surface – typically a vertical surface, while standing straight up. So, if you find urine on surface at the height of your cat's nose... you know its spraying. BUT sometimes they will spray by squatting too, so if you find the urine on a horizontal surface, you can't assume its not spraying. In either case, you can follow the steps below, and those outlined in our other blog article linked at the end of this one.

**1. Spaying or Neutering.** Spraying is often a hormonal response, and spaying or neutering can reduce or eliminate this response, at any age. But the younger the cat is fixed, the less likely they are to spray at a later age. The American Veterinary Medical Association supports "pediatric" spay/neuter which is 8 weeks to 4 months of age, as studies have shown no adverse effects to pediatric spay/neuter, and many benefits, including reduced likelihood of spraying. Hormone levels in mature pets gradually subside after the surgery, so spay/neuter of a sexually mature pet (6 months and older) may take 4-6 weeks to affect spraying behavior.

**2. Vet checkup.** You want to rule out a medical cause. Even a previously healthy cat can develop an infection. One of the most common ways for a cat to try to communicate that they are unhappy or uncomfortable – and are urinating outside their litterbox. Ask your vet to do BOTH types of urine-specific tests: a urinalysis for infection, and a urine CULTURE for bacterial overgrowth. Medical treatment is often the cure for this spraying cause.

**3. Routine.** Did something change in your cat's routine? Are they newly adopted, did you get another new pet, did someone new move in or out, did you get a new job or change your schedule, change litter brands, or even rearrange or get new furniture? Cats often get stressed by change, and spraying can be one way they show their stress. Time and resuming a routine are often the solutions for this spraying cause. See also "stress" below.

**4. Territory.** If a new cat moves in next door, or a new person (or baby) moves into your home, they may spray to mark their territory. If it something outside your home, block access to where the cat is seeing/smelling that intruder – lock them out of that room, close the window shades, install a humane motion-activated 'scarecrow' sprinkler to keep intruders away from your home. If the 'intruder' is inside your home, see "stress" below.

**5. Stress.** Spraying a calming synthetic cat hormone (one popular brand name is Feliway) all over and around where the cat has been spraying may be the fix for this cause. They also offer a plugin version that many cat owners feel works better, using one in every room. Vets can also prescribe anti-stress medication – often referred to as "kitty prozac" – that can help destress the cat so it stops spraying, giving you time to clean and get them back on their routine as a permanent spraying fix if stress is part of or the total cause. Also, ask your vet about the treat chew version or transdermal cream version so you don't have to add to your cat's stress by trying to get him to eat a pill, though some cats will easily eat up pills wrapped in soft treats.

**6. Smells.** Cats are very sensitive to smells, and may be spraying to cover up an unwanted smell. This is common when the cat is spraying on the trash can, in the bathroom, on a particular carpet that may have a smell embedded in the fibers that we can't smell. Removing the "smelly" object to a place the cat can't get to is one solution, cat urine enzyme cleanser soaking or bleach soaking (if its beach-safe) is another.

**7. New Pet in home.** This is a combination of change in routine, sharing a territory, stress, and new smells! Using a combination of all the above, and giving the pets separate time in their own rooms, and for cats/rabbits with separate litter boxes that are all their own, can do the trick to stop this reason for spraying.