**Bath Veterinary Hospital**

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**Litter Box Care 101**

Repeatedly urinating or defecating outside the litter box is called inappropriate elimination and is the number one reason that cats lose their place in a home. If this problem is already occurring, seek help from your veterinarian quickly; as the behavior can be a sign of a serious medical problem. Fast action also helps keep bad behavior from becoming a life-long habit. The following tips can help you understand your feline friend and return your cat to its fastidious ways:

Consider where the litter box is located. Cats like privacy just as humans do. Try to find a place that is away from the daily commotion of your house but not so far that your cat has to go searching for it. Cats also need to feel that they can easily escape from a litter box, as they are in a vulnerable position when using one. Therefore, they should be able to see all around the box and get out quickly. You may want to try a litter box on each level of your home. A humid bathroom may prevent the litter from drying out properly. Your cat may become fearful of the litter box if it is placed next to an appliance such as a furnace or a washing machine that may suddenly make a lot of noise. Once you find a suitable place, don’t change the litter box location.

Multiple cat households have a higher incidence of inappropriate elimination and require extra vigilance from their owners. The golden rule is at least one litter box per cat. These should be placed in different locations to keep one cat from guarding the litter box area. You may want to experiment with litter box size and style. For example, a large cat would need a large litter box while a small cat may have difficulty getting into a large box. Generally, hooded boxes are not recommended as the lack of ventilation keeps odors trapped in the box. However, some cats prefer the extra privacy. There are self-cleaning litter boxes on the market. These may be worth the extra expense for the benefits of reduced odor and less frequent cleaning. There are litter boxes that prevent dogs or small children from playing in the litter, boxes that mount in windows and use outside air for ventilation, and boxes that train your cat to use the toilet. These specialty litter boxes can be found in pet shops, cat magazines, and the internet.

Frequent, daily cleaning can’t be emphasized enough. This may be the number one factor in bad litter box habits. Keep in mind that what seems okay to your nose may not be okay to a feline nose that is a hundred times more sensitive. The scent of stool or urine is what triggers cats to dig. If you hear your kitty doing extra digging, you may need to step up your cleaning or completely overhaul the litter box. Do not use ammonia or phenol compounds (such as Lysol) to clean the box. A mild detergent is recommended, followed by an enzyme-based odor eliminator if necessary. After cleaning, rinse the box out well to prevent any strong chemical odors from chasing your cat away. Most cats like to use a clean litter box every time they go. If, after cleaning you can still smell a urine odor in the box, it may be time for a brand new box. Many cat fanciers clean their litter boxes twice a day.

There are as many different types of litter as there are boxes to put it in. There are scented, unscented, clay, clumping, crystals and natural fiber litter. Most cats prefer litter without perfumes or deodorants. Some cats prefer the softer clumping litter to the larger, sharper grain of clay litters. Different litters have different tracking, dust and disposability features. Cats that suddenly stop using the litter box after a switch to new litter probably have a litter preference. Some cats dislike litter box liners because they get their claws stuck while digging.

These are the basic things to think about when it comes to litter box etiquette. Most cats and cat owners do just fine. If you run into trouble, call your veterinarian quickly for assistance to nip inappropriate elimination in the bud.