



Marking Territory

Your cat isn't that far removed from their wild roots. They feel an instinctive urge to stake their claim by leaving their scent. While most territory marking is done through innocent rubbing or scratching, issues with urinating can also arise.

But fear not — you can teach your cats to stop using urine to mark their territory.

The importance of scent

Scent is the primary way that cats communicate. For example, when one cat comes home from the vet, the other cats in the household may treat them like a stranger at first, based on their smell. They'll have to get a good sniffing-over before they're part of the family again.

Since cats can't be in two places at once to monitor their territory, they have many scent-based ways to leave their calling card.

Marking by rubbing

Felines have scent glands on their cheeks, paws and flanks, and when they rub against something—a door, a chair, you—they put their own personal scent on that object. This leaves the message for other cats that they've been there and laid claim. Rubbing against you is a way of marking you as theirs telling other cats to back off.

In a multi-cat household, all this rubbing helps to establish territories (at least temporarily) and to create bonds between the cats. When two cats in the house meet up, they'll sniff each other, and one will start rubbing and maybe even grooming the other. This helps to ease tension between them.

Marking by scratching

When your cat scratches something, they're doing more than sharpening their claws; they're leaving their scent as well.

Cats have scent glands on the pads of their feet, and scratching is another way cats mark territory. Don't punish your cats for doing what comes naturally—just train them to use a scratching post and leave the furniture alone.

Urine-marking takes two forms:

- Spraying urine on vertical surfaces
- Urinating on horizontal surfaces

Spraying is when a cat backs up to a vertical surface with their tail erect and squirts urine. Their tail often quivers while they're spraying. Regular urinating is when they squat to pee on the furniture, the floor, things lying on the floor or any other horizontal surface. Both males and females can (and do) spray and squat. Marking with urine is not a litter box issue.

Why your cat is urine marking

There are several possible reasons your cat is urine marking:

Medical issues

Medical problems can be another cause of urine-marking. Particularly with male cats, a urinary tract infection — or much worse, a blockage — may be at fault if your cat suddenly stops using the litter box or spends a lot of time trying to urinate and licking their genitals. Some cats will even urinate and cry right in front of you or try to urinate in the bathtub or sink to let you know something's wrong.

Mating behavior

The urge to spray is extremely strong in intact cats, and the simplest solution is to get yours neutered or spayed by five months of age, before there's even a problem.

If you've adopted an unneutered adult cat, get them fixed as soon as possible. Neutering solves most marking issues, even in cats that have been doing it for a while. However, the longer you wait, the greater the risk that marking behavior will be ingrained.

Stress

Cats are creatures of habit and many react badly to even slightest changes in their environment. This can include everything from a new pet or baby in the house, to a caretaker's absence, a strange cat in the backyard and other environmental factors we don't fully notice or understand.

Marking territory with urine is your cat's way of dealing with stress. They feel anxious and are trying to relieve their anxiety by staking out their boundaries. Leaving their urine scent is the most emphatic way to say, "I'm stressed."

If you see signs of medical problems, get your cat to the vet immediately. Urinary tract problems are not only painful, they can be fatal. A cat whose urinary tract is blocked can die in hours or suffer irreversible organ damage from the buildup of toxins in their system. **Urinary tract problems don't clear up by themselves and require urgent attention.**

Ways to solve marking

Finding the culprit

Isolate one cat at a time to see if the inappropriate behavior stops while they're in isolation. This method isn't foolproof, however, because if the culprit's behavior is stress-induced, it may not occur if isolation has removed them from the source of stress.

Another method is adding food-safe fluorescent dye to the cats' food (one cat at a time). The dye will glow in the cat's urine when a black light is held over it. You have your culprit.

Now that we know who it is, what do we do about it?

Resolving your cat's stress is critical and requires time and plenty of patience and understanding from you. We have lots of tips to help you get your cat through their crisis. Here are a few:

- Clean soiled areas thoroughly. Don't use strong-smelling cleaners, because they may cause your pet to "over-mark" the spot.
- Make previously soiled areas inaccessible or unattractive. If this isn't possible, try to change the significance of those areas to your pet. Feed, treat and play with your pet in the areas they're inclined to mark.
- Keep objects likely to cause marking out of reach. You should place items such as guests' belongings and new purchases in a closet or cabinet.
- Restrict your pet's access to doors and windows through which they can observe animals outside.
- A short course of anti-anxiety medication may help if your cat is feeling anxious during behavior modification. Speak to your veterinarian if your cat is acting anxiously.
- Use a product like Feliway® to inhibit your cat's spraying.

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About Napa Humane

The Humane Society of Napa County and SPCA, known as Napa Humane, is a non-profit organization incorporated in 1973. Recognizing that companion animals are an important part of healthy communities, we've grown to consider Napa Humane a community service organization. Our programs and services are designed to address the needs of animals – and also to provide support, education, and assistance for all the people who care for and about them.

Napa Humane is a private and independent organization that is supported by private donations by individuals and businesses, bequests, and fees for service. We receive no government funding, tax dollars or funding from national animal welfare organizations.

Our Mission

To promote the welfare of companion animals through protection, advocacy, education, and by example.