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Outside the Box

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1. Cats are clean animals. It is normal for them to have a toilet area which is used regularly to contain their waste. They are generally tidy in this area and cover waste to reduce odors that could alert prey to their presence. A study demonstrated that a cat enjoys their toilet if they spend at least 20 seconds covering their waste.
2. They have preferences concerning the type of material they use for their toilet. Some prefer loose, sandy areas while others like soil-like material. But all cats like CLEAN. They don't like to use already soiled areas and especially if it was someone else who soiled the spot.
3. The accepted requirement for litter boxes is one for each cat in the household plus one extra. This allows each cat to find a clean box when needed. Litter boxes should be scooped daily and cleaned thoroughly at least once a week. Avoid cleansers with heavy residual odor. Lysol, Pinesol and Chlorox are no-nos in box cleaning. Hot water and dish soap works well. A run through the dishwasher or boiling water left to stand in the box for 10 minutes will disinfect the box and kill any residual parasites.
4. Experiment to find the texture your cats prefer, remember they will cover if they like the litter. But all cats hate heavy fragrance. A dog can smell a person 50 feet underwater and a cat's nose is ten times more sensitive. If you can smell it, the scent will be overpowering for your cat.
5. Options for litter include clumping (very sand-like), clay based (very soil-like), recycled newspaper (low odor), sand, and potting soil. Pine and cedar litters are often too "smelly". Dusty litter is often not preferred by cats. Baking soda in small quantities seems to be well tolerated by cats. I have some households that use two different kinds of litter for their very different friends. Try to stay with the brand your cat likes. The sale coupon may be more expensive than you think if you have to buy a new carpet. If you can't get your normal brand, or the brand changes (new and improved), watch closely to be sure that the change is accepted.
6. Litter box placement is important. All the boxes can be in the same place, but the cat must feel that he is safe and unobserved when using the box. This is a very compromised time for a predator. They will find a safe place if the place you choose is not. I had one owner who put the boxes in a utility closet that had a vent to the living room. Their cat used the boxes all summer but started to toilet in the living room by the vent once the heater kicked on in the fall.
7. Kittens and senior cats may need more accessible options than "down in the basement". Provide kittens with a **small** box (a cake pan works well for this) on every floor to which they have access. Once they are about 3 months old, you can begin putting less litter in the ones you wish to eliminate until the primary one is most desirable. They will naturally choose the one

with the most litter that is big enough to move around in. Senior cats may need to have a side cut down so they can enter the box easily. I have seen many seniors who will use the ground right beside the box because they can no longer get over the sides.

8. Cats need room in the box. Be sure the box is big enough for your cat to get around their elimination to cover up. For a large cat an under the bed tote is a good option. I have seen cats that stand in the box but eliminate over the side because the box is too small. A covered litter box has been linked with increased respiratory issues in cats. If your circumstances require or your cat prefers a covered box for safety reasons, consider sand or soil as the litter to reduce the dust that is stirred up when covering. Put a washable rug or towel at the box exit so the residual sand or soil will drop off the cat's feet here and can be cleaned up more easily.
9. ***Clean, multiple boxes, cat perceived safety, and litter texture are the most common reasons for lack of liter box use. Behavior and disease can also result in lack of box use***.
10. Behavior is blamed far too often for inappropriate elimination. Intact males will back up to vertical structures, lift their tails, twitching it rapidly and spray a little urine onto the surface. This is an act of "marking their territory" and can be seen in multiple cat household especially when a female cat is in heat, or if a stray cat is seen in the yard. Rarely, a neutered male or a female cat will still have enough testosterone to demonstrate this behavior but it will always look the same. Motion detector water sprinklers can discourage stray cats in your yard. The Home Depot has one available on-line called "Scarecrow" for less than \$100. Feliway pheromone spray can help reduce this behavior spraying. Feliway is the cheek pheromone that your cat rubs on you. It says to your cat that "you are mine, I claim you". If an area is claimed with Feliway then it may not need to be marked.
11. Infections of the urinary tract of cats are relatively rare but do occur. Because infection causes pain and urgency, the cat will urinate in unusual places, often frequently with small amounts. Proper diagnosis, which often includes exploring for underlying disease causes, is necessary to determine the proper treatment. Bladder infections in cats often require long term management of underlying disease.
12. More commonly cats experience a disease condition called a number of things; Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD), Cystitis, Block Tomcat Syndrome or **Feline Interstitial Cystitis (FIC)**. This is a multifactorial disease but our best knowledge at this point describes the cause to be an abnormal response to the release of stress hormone. When some cats are stressed, the stress hormone produces an ulcerative condition in the bladder wall with associated pain, much like a Herpesvirus in people. The cat will strain to urinate and pass bloody urine. In the bladder's attempt to heal, a mucus barrier forms across these ulcers. This barrier acts as a form for excess minerals in the urine to crystallize onto. The crystals themselves are irritating. But in the male cat the urethra has a bone near the end of the penis that limits the ability of urethra to stretch; the crystals can dam up against this bone and cause a blockage. If urine does not leave the cat's body, the toxins back-up. The cat becomes sick and within several days can become toxic enough to die.
13. FIC needs to be addressed on several levels.
 - a. Diets that restrict excess minerals from passing into the bladder are necessary since blocking is life-threatening.
 - i. High protein diets such as EVO, Natures Balance Instinct or Wysong Epigen 90 are best dry food
 - ii. Specially designed foods such as Hills C/D need to be offered as canned and dry option

- iii. Increase water consumption
 - 1. Offer tuna or clam juice daily. Mix equal parts water and juice and make ice cubes. Cover with plastic wrap. Serve one daily defrosted.
 - 2. Add water to canned food, slowly increasing the amount.
 - 3. Watch how your cat drinks and offer water in that form: bottled, free flowing, cold, room temperature, etc.
 - 4. Add up to 1/16 teaspoon sea salt to food daily, increasing amount slowly.
- b. In the acute phase pain control is essential both for the cat's comfort, to reduce stress and to allow the urethra to relax.
- c. Management of stress is part of the treatment as well as the management of FIC.
 - i. Environmental factors such as inter-feline interaction, both inside and outside the house, overcrowding and feline-person interaction must be addressed as much as possible.
 - 1. Establish separate areas for cats that do not get along
 - 2. Add feliway diffusers to household
 - 3. Consider placing cats into a single cat household.
 - 4. Consider establishing a cat-friendly outdoor space.
 - 5. Remove a cat from the household if stress cannot be reduced
 - ii. Environments must be enriched.
 - 1. Establish a bird feeder outside a window or a fish tank indoors
 - 2. Play cat-entertaining videos while gone
 - 3. Get cat-interactive toys and feeders
 - 4. Hide food
 - 5. Establish perches and hiding places for each cat
 - iii. Anti-stress medication may be needed long-term or at least if stress is anticipated (construction, moving, vacation, new member in house or household member leaving).