

## *Apparently Size Matters for Cats*

*By George Cuellar, DVM, Diplomate ABVP C/F*

Tragically, in North America, tens of thousands of cats are euthanized or surrendered to shelters each year for behavior problems. Of these cats, between 40 and 75% of all cats presented for behavior problems have an elimination disorder involving urination or defecation. This can take many forms. Cats will eliminate just outside the box or sit on the edge of the box and urinate or defecate. They may eliminate around the house or on furniture. This needs to be differentiated from “spraying”. Spraying is a whole other problem and is usually done on vertical surfaces such as walls and furniture legs or sides. Spraying is territorial and may be stress related. Before we put all cats on Prozac, let’s explore some reasons cats behave this way. Ruling out disease is the first very important step to know the problem is behavioral. Seek a blood test and urinalysis at your veterinarian as a first step.

In general, cats need to be active, busy, stimulated, and able to explore their environment. Try to create places where cats can climb or get into things like paper grocery bags left on the floor. Hide little bits of food in different places. Cat’s sense of smell is so much better than ours so let them explore and find. Build a cat tree for height and make it graduated or buy one. Crumple up little bits of paper and leave them out to play with. Rotate toys and do not do the same thing every day. Create adventure and exploration to keep cats busy. Cats sleep 16 hour a day so make the awake eight exciting. A busy active cat is less stressed leading to less behavior problems in general.

In the Journal of Veterinary Behavior; January 21, 2014, Norma C. Guy and colleagues published a study about litter boxes: *Litterbox size preference in domestic cats (Felis catus)*.

The objective of this study was to evaluate the response of healthy housebound domestic cats to the simultaneous provision of 2 litterboxes of differing sizes by recording the average daily frequency of urination and defecation in each box. Forty-three households with 74 privately owned cats were each provided with 2 different-sized plastic containers, with the larger box being 33 inches in length, exceeding the size of commercially available litterboxes. Owners kept a logbook to record daily urine and fecal deposits in the boxes over a 4-week period. The 2 litterboxes changes sides of the room after two weeks. Over the 28-day period, there were a total of 5031 urine and fecal deposits in the larger boxes and 3239 urine and fecal deposits in the regular boxes. Large boxes were preferentially selected over regular boxes Results indicate that most cats show a definite preference for a larger litterbox than is typically available to them.

The current liter boxes available are like us using a small closet as a bathroom, Yuk. I recommend the Underbed Box w/Locking Lid Clear 33-7/8" x 18-1/8" x 6" h available online at the Container Store. Go to containerstore.com and search for product 10049997. It is best with new kittens to start with a larger litter box.

Avoid “substrate aversion” which is when cats do not like the feel or smell of the litter. Always use a litter that is liked not one that is on sale and never change. Dr. Elsey's Precious Cat Attract Cat Litter can be used if there is a problem. It often works. Keep the litter clean and scooped out daily. If the litter box is covered then uncover it since cats may avoid covered boxes. Put the box in a location where there are no threats such as from dogs in the house or scary noises. In multiple cat households, there should be multiple boxes in different areas of the house not the same room. At least one on each floor of a multilevel house is best

Some cats need medication to control behaviors problems but we should eliminate environmental factors first and only use medication as a last resort or as a temporary bridge to a new healthy environment.

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