

GENERAL HEALTH INFORMATION

Human Drugs

PLEASE NOT GIVE YOUR PET ANY HUMAN MEDICATIONS WITHOUT CONSULTING YOUR VETERINARIAN FIRST. The physiology of a dog or cat is very different than that of a human and what is safe for us may very well be deadly for them.

Foods to Avoid

Xylitol - is a sweetener that's contained in many sugar-free gums, breath mints, candies and even a few baked goods. Xylitol is used in place of sugar, and its most commonly found in "sugar free" chewing gum and candy products, which are the primary source of xylitol poisoning for dogs. Xylitol is dangerous to dogs because it triggers a sudden release of insulin, which causes a dramatic drop in blood sugar (hypoglycemia), essentially throwing the dog's body into a form of shock.

Avocado (all parts) - the toxic ingredient in avocado is called persin (toxic amount unknown). Most documented cases of poisoning have been in livestock that have eaten all parts of the avocado and in large amounts. The toxin may be confined to the leaves, bark, skin or seed but the flesh is thought to be poisonous to birds.

Pear seeds, the kernels of plums, peaches and apricots, apple core seeds (contain cyanogenic glycosides resulting in cyanide poisoning)

Potato peelings and green looking potatoes

Rhubarb leaves

Moldy/spoiled foods (keep garbage lid firmly on)

Alcohol

Yeast dough

Coffee grounds, beans & tea (caffeine)

Hops (used in home brewing)

Tomato leaves & stems (green parts)

Broccoli (in large amounts)

Raisins and grapes

Cigarettes, tobacco, cigars

Cooked bones - they can splinter and cause gut perforation, as well as blockages in the intestine, tooth fractures, and cooked chop bones can get stuck across the roof of the mouth

Corn cobs - a common cause of intestinal blockage requiring surgical removal

Macadamia nuts - The toxic compound is unknown but the affect of macadamia nuts is to cause locomotory difficulties. Dogs develop a tremor of the skeletal muscles, and weakness or paralysis of the hindquarters. Affected dogs are often unable to rise and are distressed, usually panting. Some affected dogs have swollen limbs and show pain when the limbs are manipulated.

Chocolate toxicity - Cocoa powder and cooking chocolate are the most toxic forms. A 10-kilogram dog can be seriously affected if it eats a quarter of a 250gm packet of cocoa powder or half of a 250gm block of cooking chocolate. These forms of chocolate contain ten times more theobromine than milk chocolate. Thus, a chocolate mud cake could be a real health risk for a small dog. Even licking a substantial part of the chocolate icing from a cake can make a dog unwell. Semi-sweet chocolate and dark chocolate are the next most dangerous forms, with milk chocolate being the least dangerous. A dog needs to eat more than a 250gm block of milk chocolate to be affected. Obviously, the smaller the dog, the less it needs to eat.

Grapes and Raisins - Grapes and raisins are toxic for dogs. Grapes and raisins (which are dried grapes) will trigger acute renal (kidney) failure.

Onions & Garlic - in larger quantities can be dangerous, If you feed onions or garlic to him regularly, his red blood cells may weaken and literally fall apart.

17 Poisonous Plants

Lilies -Members of the *Lilium* spp. are considered to be highly toxic to cats. While the poisonous component has not yet been identified, it is clear that with even ingestions of very small amounts of the plant, severe kidney damage could result.

Marijuana -Ingestion of *Cannabis sativa* by companion animals can result in depression of the central nervous system and in-coordination, as well as vomiting, diarrhea, drooling, increased heart rate, and even seizures and coma.

Sago Palm - All parts of *Cycas Revoluta* are poisonous, but the seeds or “nuts” contain the largest amount of toxin. The ingestion of just one or two seeds can result in very serious effects, which include vomiting, diarrhea, depression, seizures and liver failure.

Tulip/Narcissus bulbs - The bulb portions of *Tulipa*/*Narcissus* spp. contain toxins that can cause intense gastrointestinal irritation, drooling, loss of appetite, depression of the central nervous system, convulsions and cardiac abnormalities.

Azalea/Rhododendron - Members of the *Rhododendron* spp. contain substances known as grayantoxins, which can produce vomiting, drooling, diarrhea, weakness and depression of the central nervous system in animals. Severe azalea poisoning could ultimately lead to coma and death from cardiovascular collapse.

Oleander - All parts of *Nerium oleander* are considered to be toxic, as they contain cardiac glycosides that have the potential to cause serious effects—including gastrointestinal tract irritation, abnormal heart function, hypothermia and even death.

Castor Bean -The poisonous principle in *Ricinus communis* is ricin, a highly toxic protein that can produce severe abdominal pain, drooling, vomiting, diarrhea, excessive thirst, weakness and loss of appetite. Severe cases of poisoning can result in dehydration, muscle twitching, tremors, seizures, coma and death.

Cyclamen -Cyclamen species contain cyclamine, but the highest concentration of this toxic component is typically located in the root portion of the plant. If consumed, Cyclamen can produce significant gastrointestinal irritation, including intense vomiting. Fatalities have also been reported in some cases.

Kalanchoe -This plant contains components that can produce gastrointestinal irritation, as well as those that are toxic to the heart, and can seriously affect cardiac rhythm and rate.

Yew -*Taxus* spp. contains a toxic component known as taxine, which causes central nervous system effects such as trembling, in-coordination, and difficulty breathing. It can also cause significant gastrointestinal irritation and cardiac failure, which can result in death.

Amaryllis -Common garden plants popular around Easter, *Amaryllis* species contain toxins that can cause vomiting, depression, diarrhea, abdominal pain, hypersalivation, anorexia and tremors. *Autumn Crocus* -Ingestion of *Colchicum autumnale* by pets can result in oral irritation, bloody vomiting, diarrhea, shock, multi-organ damage and bone marrow suppression.

Chrysanthemum -These popular blooms are part of the Compositae family, which contain pyrethrins that may produce gastrointestinal upset, including drooling, vomiting and diarrhea, if eaten. In certain cases depression and loss of coordination may also develop if enough of any part of the plant is consumed.

English Ivy -Also called branching ivy, glacier ivy, needlepoint ivy, sweetheart ivy and California ivy, *Hedera helix* contains triterpenoid saponins that, should pets ingest, can result in vomiting, abdominal pain, hypersalivation and diarrhea.

Peace Lily (AKA Mauna Loa Peace Lily) -*Spathiphyllum* contains calcium oxalate crystals that can cause oral irritation, excessive drooling, vomiting, difficulty in swallowing and intense burning and irritation of the mouth, lips and tongue in pets who ingest.

Pothos -*Pothos* (both *Scindapsus* and *Epipremnum*) belongs to the Araceae family. If chewed or ingested, this popular household plant can cause significant mechanical irritation and swelling of the oral tissues and other parts of the gastrointestinal tract.

Schefflera - *Schefflera* and *Brassaia actinophylla* contain calcium oxalate crystals that can cause oral irritation, excessive drooling, vomiting, difficulty in swallowing and intense burning and irritation of the mouth, lips and tongue in pets who ingest

What To Do If Your Pet Is Poisoned

Don't panic. Rapid response is important, but panicking can interfere with the process of helping your pet.

Take 30 to 60 seconds to safely collect and have at hand any material involved. This may be of great benefit to your vet and/or APCC toxicologists, as they determine what poison or poisons are involved. In the event that you need to take your pet to a local veterinarian, be sure to take the product's container with you. Also, collect in a sealable plastic bag any material your pet may have vomited or chewed.

If you witness your pet consuming material that you suspect might be toxic, do not hesitate to seek emergency assistance, even if you do not notice any adverse effects. Sometimes, even if poisoned, an animal may appear normal for several hours or for days after the incident.

Call the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center

The telephone number is (888) 426-4435. There is a \$65 consultation fee for this service.

Be ready with the following information:

- The species, breed, age, sex, weight and number of animals involved.
- The animal's symptoms.
- Information regarding the exposure, including the agent (if known), the amount of the agent involved and the time elapsed since the time of exposure.
- Have the product container/packaging available for reference.

Please note: If your animal is having seizures, losing consciousness, is unconscious or is having difficulty breathing, telephone ahead and bring your pet immediately to your local veterinarian or emergency veterinary clinic. If necessary, he or she may call the APCC.

Be Prepared

Keep the telephone number of the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center—(888) 426-4435—as well as that of your local veterinarian, in a prominent location.

Invest in an emergency first-aid kit for your pet. The kit should contain:

- A fresh bottle of hydrogen peroxide, 3 percent USP (to induce vomiting)
- A turkey baster, bulb syringe or large medicine syringe (to administer peroxide)
- Saline eye solution
- Artificial tear gel (to lubricate eyes after flushing)
- Mild grease-cutting dishwashing liquid (for bathing an animal after skin contamination)
- Forceps (to remove stingers)
- A muzzle (to protect against fear- or excitement-induced biting)
- A can of your pet's favorite wet food
- A pet carrier

Always consult a veterinarian or the APCC for directions on how and when to use any emergency firstaid item.

Introducing Your New Cat To Your Other Pets

Copyright 2000. Denver Dumb Friends League. All rights reserved. It's important to have realistic expectations when introducing a new pet to a resident pet. Some cats are more social than other cats. For example, an eight-year-old cat that has never been around other animals may never learn to share her territory (and her people) with other pets in the household. However, an eightweek-old kitten separated from her mom and littermates for the first time, might prefer to have a cat or dog companion. Cats are territorial and need to be introduced to other animals very slowly in order to give them time to get used to each other before there is a face-to-face confrontation. Slow introductions help prevent fearful and aggressive problems from developing. PLEASE NOTE: When you introduce pets to each other, one of them may send "play" signals which can be misinterpreted by the other pet. If those signals are interpreted as aggression by one animal, then you should handle the situation as "aggressive."

Confinement

Confine your new cat to one medium-sized room with her litter box, food, water and a bed. Feed your resident pets and the newcomer on each side of the door to this room. This will help all of them to associate something enjoyable (eating!) with each other's smells. Don't put the food so close to the door that the animals are too upset by each other's presence to eat. Gradually move the dishes closer to the door until your pets can eat calmly, directly on either side of the door. Next, use two doorstops to prop open the door just enough to allow the animals to see each other, and repeat the whole process.

Swap Scents

Switch sleeping blankets or beds between your new cat and your resident animals so they have a chance to become accustomed to each other's scent. Rub a towel on one animal and put it underneath the food dish of another animal. You should do this with each animal in the house.

Switch Living Areas

Once your new cat is using her litter box and eating regularly while confined, let her have free time in the house while confining your other animals to the new cat's room. This switch provides another way for the animals to experience each other's scents without a face-to-face meeting. It also allows the newcomer to become familiar with her new surroundings without being frightened by the other animals.

Avoid Fearful And Aggressive Meetings

Avoid any interactions between your pets that result in either fearful or aggressive behavior. If these responses are allowed to become a habit, they can be difficult to change. It's better to introduce your pets to each other so gradually that neither animal becomes afraid or aggressive. You can expect mild forms of these behaviors, but don't give them the opportunity to intensify. If either animal becomes fearful or aggressive, separate them, and start over with the introduction process in a series of very small, gradual steps, as outlined above.

Precautions

If one of your pets has a medical problem or is injured, this could stall the introduction process. Check with your veterinarian to be sure that all of your pets are healthy. You'll also want to have at least one litter box per cat, and you'll probably need to clean all of the litter boxes more frequently. Make sure that none of the cats are being "ambushed" by another while trying to use the litter box. Try to keep your resident pets' schedule as close as possible to what it was before the newcomer's appearance. Cats can make lots of noise, pull each other's hair, and roll around quite dramatically without either cat being injured. If small spats do occur between your cats, you shouldn't attempt to intervene directly to separate the cats. Instead, make a loud noise, throw a pillow, or use a squirt bottle with water and vinegar to separate the cats. Give them a chance to calm down before re-introducing them to each other. Be sure each cat has a safe hiding place.

Cat To Dog Introductions

Dogs can kill a cat very easily, even if they're only playing. All it takes is one shake and the cat's neck can break. Some dogs have such a high prey drive they should never be left alone with a cat. Dogs usually want to chase and play with cats, and cats usually become afraid and defensive. Use the techniques described above to begin introducing your new cat to your resident dog. In addition:

Practice Obedience

If your dog doesn't already know the commands "sit," "down," "come" and "stay," you should begin working on them. Small pieces of food will increase your dog's motivation to perform, which will be necessary in the presence of such a strong distraction as a new cat. Even if your dog already knows these commands, work with obeying commands in return for a tidbit.

Controlled Meeting

After your new cat and resident dog have become comfortable eating on opposite sides of the door, and have been exposed to each other's scents as described above, you can attempt a face-to-face introduction in a controlled manner. Put your dog's leash on, and using treats, have him either sit or lie down and stay. Have another family member or friend enter the room and quietly sit down next to your new cat, but don't have them physically restrain her. Have this person offer your cat some special pieces of food or catnip. At first, the cat and the dog should be on opposite sides of the room. Lots of short visits are better than a few long visits. Don't drag out the visit so long that the dog becomes uncontrollable. Repeat this step several times until both the cat and dog are tolerating each other's presence without fear, aggression or other undesirable behavior.

Let Your Cat Go

Next, allow your cat freedom to explore your dog at her own pace, with the dog still on-leash and in a "downstay." Meanwhile, keep giving your dog treats and praise for his calm behavior. If your dog gets up from his "stay" position, he should be repositioned with a treat lure, and praised and rewarded for obeying the "stay" command. If your cat runs away or becomes aggressive, you're progressing too fast. Go back to the previous introduction steps. **Positive Reinforcement**

Although your dog must be taught that chasing or being rough with your cat is unacceptable behavior, he must also be taught how to behave appropriately, and be rewarded for doing so, such as sitting, coming when called, or lying down in return for a treat. If your dog is always punished when your cat is around, and never has "good things" happen in the cat's presence, your dog may redirect aggression toward the cat.

Directly Supervise All Interactions Between Your Dog And Cat

You may want to keep your dog on-leash and with you whenever your cat is free in the house during the introduction process. Be sure that your cat has an escape route and a place to hide. Keep your dog and cat separated when you aren't home until you're certain your cat will be safe.

Precautions

Dogs like to eat cat food. You should keep the cat food out of your dog's reach (in a closet or on a high shelf). Eating cat feces is also a relatively common behavior in dogs. Although there are no health hazards to your dog, it's probably distasteful to you. It's also upsetting to your cat to have such an important object "invaded." Unfortunately, attempts to keep your dog out of the litter box by "booby trapping" it will also keep your cat away as well. Punishment after the fact will not change your dog's behavior. The best solution is to place the litter box where your dog can't access it, for example: behind a baby gate; in a closet with the door anchored open from both sides and just wide enough for your cat; or inside a tall, topless cardboard box with easy access for your cat.

A Word About Kittens And Puppies

Because they're so much smaller, kittens are in more danger of being injured, of being killed by a young energetic dog, or by a predatory dog. A kitten will need to be kept separate from an especially energetic dog until she is fully-grown, and even then she should never be left alone with the dog. Usually, a well-socialized cat will be able to keep a puppy in its place, but some cats don't have enough confidence to do this. If you have an especially shy cat, you might need to keep her separated from your puppy until he matures enough to have more self-control.

When To Get Help

If introductions don't go smoothly, seek professional help immediately. Animals can be severely injured in fights, and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve. Conflicts between pets in the same family can often be resolved with professional help. Punishment won't work, though, and could make things worse.

Ten Reasons Why Two Kittens Are Better Than One

Reason #1: You're saving two lives instead of one.

"If it's kitten season, that's one more kitten that will get a home instead of growing into an adult which will decrease its chance of getting adopted." It is entirely true that kittens are much easier to place than adult cats, and the 15-month-old cat you see in the shelter today is very likely a holdover from last year's crop of kittens.

Reason #2 :

A kitten left alone during the day can become lonely and bored, which sometimes can lead to mischief. Two kittens will never be lonely, especially if they are siblings. In fact, you'll often find situations in shelters and rescue group adoption where a cage will contain two kittens with a sign, "These kittens may be adopted only as a pair." Shelter volunteers recognize that siblings really need to stay together. And since shelters are often frightening, unfriendly places to small creatures, unrelated cats often form close bonds that should be respected when adoption time comes.

Reason #3 :

Although it might sound contrary, an older, established cat will probably accept two kittens better than one. One kitten will seek out the older cat as a playmate, or worse, tease and pester the senior cat which can cause stress to an older cat. The kitten in return, will be "rewarded" for his playful efforts with hisses and swats. Two kittens will expend their energy in play with each other, leaving their older "uncle" to relax in peace.

Reason #4 :

Kittens learn by copying. If one kitten is quick to learn appropriate litter box use, the other will be likely to copy. They also help each other with grooming; wash-up after meals soon becomes a ritual with two kittens.

Reason #5 :

Even the most devoted human caregiver can quickly become exhausted by trying to keep up with the energy of a single kitten. Two kittens will wear each other out, leaving their human parent free to just enjoy watching them. The downside to this, of course, "...but of course, sometimes you have double trouble, too !"

Reason #6 :

Many people who experience behavior problems with kittens find that some of them go away when they adopt another playmate. What may be perceived as mischief is often just the result of boredom. Much like their human counterparts, kittens sometimes misbehave because "negative attention is better than no attention."

Reason #7 :

"If one kitten is finicky about food, the belligerence is often overcome by curiosity at what its *sibling* is eating. (Feed one cat Same Old, the other cat New Stuff, and they both end up tasting the new stuff.)"

Reason #8 :

Kittens will often play so hard that they simply flop where they are, and more likely than not, they will flop next to (or on top of) each other. There is no sight so endearing as two kittens curled up together for a nap. Their peaceful innocence can soften the heart of even the grumpiest curmudgeon, and the sight of that blissful moment will wash clean the slate of their previous misdoings.

Reason #9 :

"And of course, they're just so much darn fun to watch!" Having lived through (and survived nicely) the joy of adopting and raising two kittens, I can personally attest to the downright fun of having two kittens.

Reason #10 :

Two kittens who grow up together will almost always be lifelong friends. Although they will sometimes have their little squabbles (what friends don't?) you will more often see them engaging in mutual grooming, playing together, and sleeping with their best pal. If you are considering adopting a kitten, think about your best friend and consider whether you would deprive your kitten of the enrichment a friend brings to life.

Tips for the First 30 Days of Cat Adoption

by Petfinder

Tags: [After Adoption](#), [bringing-a-cat-home](#), [Cats](#), [Coming Home](#), [Food](#), [Housing](#), [tips-for-first-30-days-cat](#)

Sara Kent, Director, Shelter Outreach, Petfinder

Be prepared should be your mantra when bringing a new pet into your home. Cats are particularly sensitive to new surroundings and some may hide under a bed or in a closet for days or even weeks.

You can avoid pitfalls with your new critter and help him or her adapt more easily by following these guidelines:

- Cats are territorial, and coming into a new home leaves them feeling really uneasy. There's all that unexplored space, and who knows what may lurk there. Do him a favor and provide a small area to call his own for the first few days or weeks. A bathroom or laundry room works well. Furnish the room with cat amenities, such as food, water and a litter box. You'll want to spend time with your cat, so make sure there's a comfortable place for you to sit as well.
- Fill a litter box with one or two inches of litter and place it in his room where he can use it undisturbed. After all, everyone deserves a modicum of privacy when pottyting, and giving him that will help forestall litter box aversion. Not sure which litter to choose? Check out [How to Choose A Cat Litter](#).
- Set up a feeding station with food and water bowls. Locate it away from the litter box. For more cat feeding and nutrition tips, visit our [Pet Nutrition](#) section.
- Cats love to get away from it all in small places, and you can provide one for your new cat as his own little safe haven. If he came home in a cat carrier, that might be a good choice. You can also make one by cutting a doorway for her in the end of a box. If you prefer, you can buy a covered cat bed at a pet supply store. In either case, make sure the space is big enough for the cat to stand up and turn around in. Cat "feng shui" probably requires that he or she be able to see the door to the room from his hidey hole, so he won't be startled.
- A cat's claws need to be worn down, and they do this by scratching on things. Since you prefer that it not be your chairs and sofa, provide your cat with a socially acceptable scratching place. Some types are made of corrugated cardboard and lie on the floor; others are posts which have to be tall enough so that the cat can extend himself upward to scratch. You can encourage your cat (once he has arrived) to use the post by sprinkling it with catnip or dangling a toy at the top. He'll get the idea. You'll probably want a scratching post in each room where there is soft furniture, perhaps blocking access to it. You can also install sticky tape (available at pet supply stores) to corners of upholstered furniture to dissuade scratching. Don't miss these tips on [how to cut down on kitty's scratching](#), [how to choose a scratching post](#), and facts about [declawing cats](#).
- Look at your house with a curious cat's eye view for its climbing and exploring potential. When your cat is acclimated to your home, you may be surprised to find him on top of the upper kitchen cabinets, so make sure there's nothing on display there or on other high shelves that can be damaged or knocked off.

- Look for holes or registers that leave ductwork accessible and cover them up. A kitten can easily slither into one of these. You won't want firemen in the house, jackhammering the concrete floor to extract your cat.
- If possible, buy a cat tree for your new family member. Cats like to survey their territory, so a high perch is often a favored resting place.
- If there are other human family members, go over the ground rules about your new pet. Remind them not to startle him and to keep the door to his room shut.
- Bone up on how to introduce your cat to other pets. Keep her door closed and don't let your other pet race in unexpectedly. See also: [New Cat Introductions](#) and [Living with Cats and Dogs](#).

First Day:

Now, you are ready for your cat's homecoming. Preferably, bring her home in a cat carrier. It will feel safer to her. She has seen a lot of excitement, so take her directly to her new room. (Make sure the toilet lid is down, if she's to acclimate in your bathroom.) Ideally, you would restrict her exposure to the whole family, but naturally, everyone is going to want to see her. Remind them of the ground rules you've set up.

- Sit on the floor and let her come to you. Don't force her. Just let her get acquainted on her own time. If she doesn't approach, leave her alone and try again later. Some cats are particularly frightened, and she may retreat to her hidey hole and not come out when you're around at all. She may only come out at night when the house is quiet. Give her time.
- Your newly adopted cat may not eat much or at all at first. It's best to give your cat the same food she had at the shelter or in her foster home, at least at first. Keeping some things familiar will make her feel more secure. Be sure to change her water frequently and make sure that she is drinking. If your cat hasn't eaten for a few days, call your vet to ask for advice.

Following Weeks:

It may take your cat a week or two to adjust. Be patient.

- Within a week of being adopted, take your newly adopted cat for her first wellness visit with a veterinarian. If you have a record of immunizations from the shelter, take it with you. Don't have a vet? Check out these tips for [finding the right vet](#) for you and your cat.
- As your cat adjusts, she'll show signs that she wants to explore outside her safe haven. Make sure other pets or family members won't startle her while she gradually expands her territory. She may be ready to play, so you can furnish some toys. Many cats like feather wands from the pet supply store, but homemade toys are often favored. A wad of a tissue paper to bat around or a paper bag to hide in can be fun. For more ideas on how to keep your cat entertained see [Keeping Your Cat from Getting Bored](#).

Declawing Cats

Written by Veterinarian, Dr. Christianne Schelling

If you are considering declawing your cat, please read this. It will only take a moment, and it will give you valuable information to help you in your decision.

First, you should know that declawing is pretty much an American thing, it's something people do for their own convenience without realizing what actually happens to their beloved cat. In England declawing is termed "inhumane" and "unnecessary mutilation." I agree. In many European countries it is illegal. I applaud their attitude.

Before you make the decision to declaw your cat, there are some important facts you should know. Declawing is not like a manicure. It is serious surgery. Your cat's claw is not a toenail. It is actually closely adhered to the bone. So closely adhered that to remove the claw, the last bone of your the cat's claw has to be removed. Declawing is actually an amputation of the last joint of your cat's "toes". When you envision that, it becomes clear why declawing is not a humane act. It is a painful surgery, with a painful recovery period. And remember that during the time of recuperation from the surgery your cat would still have to use its feet to walk, jump, and scratch in its litter box regardless of the pain it is experiencing. Wheelchairs and bedpans are not an option for a cat.

No cat lover would doubt that cats—whose senses are much keener than ours—suffer pain. They may, however, hide it better. Not only are they proud, they instinctively know that they are at risk when in a weakened position, and by nature will attempt to hide it. But make no mistake. This is not a surgery to be taken lightly.

Your cat's body is perfectly designed to give it the grace, agility and beauty that is unique to felines. Its claws are an important part of this design. Amputating the important part of their anatomy that contains the claws drastically alters the conformation of their feet. The cat is also deprived of its primary means of defense, leaving it prey to predators if it ever escapes to the outdoors.

I have also had people tell me that their cat's personality changed after being declawed. Although, the medical community does not recognize this as potential side effect.

Okay, so now you realize that declawing is too drastic a solution, but you're still concerned about keeping your household furnishings intact. Is there an acceptable solution? Happily, the answer is yes. A big, joyful, humane YES! Actually there are several. The following website ["Cat Scratching Solutions"](#) provides many solutions as well as and insight into the psychology of why cats scratch. You can teach your cat to use a scratching post ([sisal posts](#) are by far the best). You can trim the front claws. You can also employ aversion methods. One of the best solutions I've found is Soft Paws®.

Soft Paws are lightweight vinyl nail caps that you glue on the cat's front claws. They're great for households with small children and are extremely useful for people who are away from home all day and can't exercise the watchfulness necessary to train a cat to use a scratching post. Soft Paws® are easy to apply and last about four to six weeks. They come in clear or colors—which are really fun. Now *that's* a kitty manicure! The colored caps look spiffy on Tabby or Tom and have the added advantage of being more visible when one finally comes off. Then you simply replace it. You can find Soft Paws® on the web by [clicking here](#) or call 1-800-989-2542.

You need to remember, though, that the caps and nail trimming should only be used on indoor cats who will not be vulnerable to the dangers of the outdoors.

Inappropriate Urinating in Cats

Inappropriate urination is the most common behavioral problem reported by cat owners. It is a leading cause of cats being abandoned outdoors, left at shelters, and euthanized. There is no doubt that it is extremely frustrating to have a cat that is urinating on your carpeting, bedding, or clothing. Most cases of inappropriate elimination can be resolved, but it may take some detective work and adjustments to your household to achieve it.

Why Do Cats Use Litter Boxes?

Many of us assume that cats use litter boxes instinctively. Actually, their impulse is to eliminate in soft soil or sand. The box is a convenience for humans, and it's really rather amazing that cats are so accommodating about it. Understanding this point will be a great help to both you and your cat. Elimination is a basic necessity, but in cat terms this function has an additional meaning. Cats sometimes use elimination as a communication tool to help establish their territory. So if your cat is not using the litter box, he may be trying to communicate something.

What is Inappropriate Urination in Cats?

It is important to differentiate between the two types of urinating outside of the litter box: spraying and inappropriate urination.

Spraying is performed by the cat standing and spraying a stream of urine on a vertical surface such as a wall, window, furniture, drapes, etc.

- This is a normal behavior for cats, and it serves to mark their territory.
- Both male and female cats spray, but it is most common in unneutered male cats. Neutering that is performed prior to six months of age will eliminate the vast majority of spraying behavior.

Inappropriate urination is when a cat urinates in the normal squatting position, but not in the litter box.

Causes of Inappropriate Urination in Cats

- **Medical problems:** Urinary tract infections, diabetes mellitus, kidney disease, arthritis, and other medical problems are all common reasons for cats to urinate outside of their litter box.
- **Litter box aversions:** Cats can develop an aversion to the litter box for any of a number of reasons. These generally fall into the following categories:
 - Negative experiences in the litter box ◦

Box location aversions

- Substrate (litter type) aversions or preferences

Medical Problems

The first thing to do if you have a cat that is urinating outside of the litter box is to take him to the veterinarian. A urinalysis and possibly blood work can help to determine if there is an underlying medical condition contributing to the problem. If a medical cause is not found, it is time to do some detective work. It's important to understand the non-medical reasons that cats eliminate outside of the litter box in order to determine why yours could be doing it.

Negative Experiences in the Litter Box

Your cat may develop an aversion to litter boxes in general under some of the following circumstances:

- **Your cat has been harassed in some way while using the litter box.**
 - Children sometimes like to stalk cats and can often only catch them while they are in the litter box. ◦ A dominant cat may ambush a meeker cat while he is in the vulnerable position of using the box.
 - Cat-owners sometimes capture cats in the litter box in order to administer unpleasant medication.
 - Cats that have been caught in the act of urinating somewhere inappropriate, punished, and then shoved into their litter box will most likely experience a reinforced aversion to it.

Dogs in the household may like to stalk cats when they are in the litter box. This may be because it is the only time they can catch them, or they may be hoping to be rewarded with some cat feces. Some dogs seem to love eating cat stool.

▣ **Cats do not want to use a dirty litter box.** ◦ Cats are generally pretty fanatic about being clean. They don't like to walk into a litter box and get urine or feces on their paws. This is an even more unpleasant experience for them than it is for us when we walk into a smelly, dirty port-a-potty. Cats will often seek another, cleaner spot to eliminate if the box is consistently too dirty.

◦ Cats are very sensitive to the smells of other cats and will sometimes avoid the waste of an ill housemate. If one cat is sick or on medications that change the odor of their excrement, the other cats may avoid the litter box.

▣ **Cats will often associate any pain or discomfort that they are having with the environment at that moment, and this can create a litter box aversion.** ◦ Cats that have suffered from urinary tract infections, cystitis, or a blocked urethra have experienced pain when they try to urinate.

◦ Cats that have had gastrointestinal problems accompanied by painful defecation (constipation, gas, or diarrhea) may associate those feelings with the litter box. Even the experience of having diarrhea, then getting it on his paws when he tries to cover it could upset your cat. ◦ Cats that have experienced anal sac impaction and subsequently felt pain during defecation may develop an aversion to the litter box. ◦ Some owners have noticed a litter box aversion after they have added baking soda to the box in order to reduce odors. When urine hits the baking soda, it fizzes, and that may scare your cat. ◦ Cats may develop a litter box aversion after a declaw surgery or other paw or nail injury. The litter may irritate painful paws wounds even more, or the act of digging in the box could cause extra soreness. They could associate that added discomfort with the box.

Box Location Aversion

Location aversion means that your cat does not like the place that you chose to put his litter box. It's important to provide your cat with a place to eliminate where he feels safe and comfortable. The most common problems with litter box locations are as follows:

- **The box is located near loud or startling objects** such as washing machines, dryers, televisions, stereos, or anything with a timer that may go off when the cat is using the box.
 - Cats don't like to be startled. If your cat has experienced a loud eruption of noise while he was using the litter box, he may be afraid to use it again.
- **The box is near the cat's food and water.**
 - Cats intuitively know that it's not good to eliminate near their food and water source. If the litter box is too close to these (or to your cat's bed), he may instinctively choose a spot that's further away.
 - ▣ **The box is in a location that has too much traffic.**
 - Cats prefer privacy when they are using a litter box. People and cats have a lot in common in that area.
 - ▣ **There is no escape route.**
 - Cats always want to know that they can escape a situation if necessary. A litter box that is placed in an area where your cat may be cornered by another cat, a dog, a child, or a human will likely be one that he hates to use.

Box Type Preferences

Many cats have a kitty wish list regarding the litter box itself. Following are the most common box preferences for cats:

- ▣ **Most cats do not like covered litter boxes**, though they are preferred by a few cats because they provide increased privacy.
 - The cover can prevent cats from being able to scratch around in the litter or get into a comfortable position for eliminating.
 - Humans like covered boxes because less odor escapes into the home, but that means that the smell is more concentrated inside the box. Cats are very sensitive to smells, and the ammonia concentration in the urine can even bother their eyes when it builds up inside of a covered box.
 - If you do use a covered box, even more frequent scooping and cleaning than usual is required (see cleaning tips below).
- ▣ **Provide large, shallow litter boxes.**
 - The larger the box, the better. The box should be at least 24 inches long or wide. Cats like to be able to scratch around in the litter, move this way and that, and get in just the right position to comfortably eliminate. If the box is too small, your cat may develop an aversion to it or constantly miss and urinate over the edge.

- Cats like shallow boxes so they can get in and out of them easily. This becomes even more important as your cat ages and may develop sore joints that make it harder to jump into boxes with high sides. Since a box with low sides may allow litter to fly out all over when your cat covers his excrement, an alternative is to use a covered box without the lid or a plastic storage tub with an entryway cut into the side. This will provide higher sides for containing litter but easy entrance for your cat.
- Under-the-bed sweater boxes make great litter boxes. They are large, shallow, and you can place the lid underneath of the box to help catch stray litter.
- Many cats do not like plastic tray liners.
- Cats' nails get caught in the plastic liner, they may dislike its texture, and the noise it makes when they scratch at it may be displeasing to them.

Litter (Substrate) Aversions

- A number of different litters are available, but most cats prefer the scoop-able clumping litters. They are soft and sand-like and are considered a perfect elimination substrate for most cats. Plain sand is also loved by most cats.
- Crystal litters are another option. These absorb urine and its odor completely but still need to be scooped daily. Most cats will only urinate in crystals, so another box with a different type of litter should be provided for defecation.
- Many cats dislike deodorant litters because the smell is too powerful for them.
- Strong-smelling cedar or pine chip litters are often disliked and avoided by cats.
- Cats with long, fine hair (such as Persians) seem to be more particular to substrate preferences than other cats.

How Can You Tell If Your Cat Is Developing a Litter Box Aversion?

It is important to deal with inappropriate urination problems immediately. The longer the behavior persists, the more difficult it is to change. It is even more helpful if you can spot the problem coming before it actually begins and take steps to deter it.

You may be able to catch your cat's litter box aversion while it is developing if you notice any of the following signs:

- Your cat eliminates just outside of the litter box.
- Your cat hesitates quite a bit before entering his box and tries not to move around too much once he is in it.
- Your cat scratches the area outside of the box but does not scratch at the litter once he is inside. Note: your cat may scratch both outside and inside of the box normally, but he should not only scratch outside of it.
- Your cat perches precariously on the edge of the box, appearing as though he doesn't want to touch anything inside of it.
- Your cat leaps out of the box as soon as he is finished. He may even run away from the box like something is chasing him.

NOTE: It is not uncommon for cats to leave their urine and feces uncovered. In the wild, many cats do this to mark their territory. On its own, leaving litter box contents uncovered is not a sign that your cat is developing a litter box aversion.

Inappropriate urination in cats is a frustrating problem. Understanding your cat's behavior, then using a systematic approach to changing it can have you living in harmony with your feline friend again.