

Understanding Your Cat 'Spraying'



Cats are very sensitive creatures and have a need to express feelings of anxiety, insecurity or protection of their territory. Spraying is one of the ways they achieve this and in fact the majority of cats whether male, female or neutered will engage in spraying behaviour at some point in their lives. Generally, this takes place outdoors when cats are feeling under pressure from other animals and seek to define their territory. However, occasionally cats will take to spraying indoors if they are stressed or finding something threatening within their living environment. It is often used as a 'self-comforting' strategy.

General Health

Underlying health problems may be at the root of a sudden change in your cat's behaviour. Cystitis or kidney disease for instance, can cause a cat to spray simply because the urge to urinate is frequent and can be painful. It is important to ensure that your cat has a thorough health check with the vet if spraying suddenly occurs.

Spraying or Urinating?

It is important to recognise the difference. –

Spraying is carried out whilst your cat is standing with small jets of urine directed at a vertical surface. Urinating takes place in a squatting position and will result in a larger 'puddle' on the floor. If inappropriate urinating is the problem your cat may need training to use a litter tray.

Encouraging Your Cat to Use a Litter Tray

Cats are very fastidious and prefer to use a fresh tray. Use a large, well filled tray and clean it after each use. Provide at least one tray for each cat in the house.

Cats will not use a litter tray in close proximity to their food. Keep the tray and food apart, even in a separate but accessible room if possible.

Place the litter tray in a quiet, secluded area of the house. Shy or nervous cats prefer a hooded tray.

Always wash your hands after handling the litter tray as cats' faeces may harbour the toxoplasmosis parasite.

Common Reasons for Spraying

The cat is an un-neutered male

Neutering may greatly improve the problem as tomcats often spray to define their territory.

The cat is not trained to use a litter tray

The cat does not know where it is appropriate to urinate and spray. Providing a large, well- filled and constantly clean litter tray and confining him to a smaller area in the house may help to initiate him.

Too many cats living in close quarters

Each cat will try to gain some personal space by spraying their area. Try a less crowded environment. Cats Protection recommends that an average 3 bedroom house can ideally accommodate 2 cats.

The cat is rescued or re-homed

Time, patience and lots of affection should help to give your cat confidence and security in his new home.

The home is too busy or noisy for a timid cat

The cat may benefit from an undisturbed, calm area where he can retreat to at any time.

New stresses within the external environment

The arrival of a new cat or dog on his customary territory outdoors can discourage your cat from going outside. Extra attention and a cosy area of the house helps to boost his confidence. Escorting your cat outside will give him confidence until he gets used to the changes.

Changes which are stressful within the house

Often a change in behaviour can begin with an event which is perceived as stressful by the cat.

For instance: a house move, a new baby, builders, the arrival of another pet or other domestic upheaval.

Allow your cat its own space where it will be undisturbed. Introduce new pets gradually and never let them harass your existing cat in any way. Cat flaps often worry cats as they may allow other cats to get in.

Remember, spraying is your cat's natural way of coping with stress and not a deliberate act of defiance. It is usually a short-term response to changes in the living environment. Do not to punish your cat however exasperated you are, as this will only exacerbate the problem.

Preventing the 'spraying habit'

Cleaning

If you do not remove all lingering traces of urine your cat will be drawn back to the same areas to top up the scent. Many household substances contain ammonia and chlorine which are both found in cat's urine and therefore make the problem worse.

Tips for Cleaning

- Wash soiled areas with a solution of warm water and biological washing powder (patch test fabrics / carpets first)
- Rinse with cold water and allow to dry
- Do not allow your cat access to the area while you are cleaning it.

Products useful in tackling the problem are available from reception:

Total Care Odour Free

Total Care Odour / Stain Remover



Preventing Re - Spraying

Keep your cat away from areas that have been previously sprayed for a couple of days.

Rearrange the furniture to obscure favourite areas and help to disrupt the habit.

Place sheets of tin foil on the floor beneath the spraying area as cats hate to tread on this or leave a bowl of food (not his favourite) under the spot as a deterrent.

Anxiety based spraying may be helped by using a calming feline pheromone substance around the house. **Feliway®**, available from the surgery, plugs into an electric socket like an air freshener and although undetectable to the human nose mimics the natural chemicals found in your cat's scent glands. This helps to reduce stress and anxiety.

For more information
Please contact your Avonvale Vet

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