

HOUSE-SOILING: Take-Home Instructions for Cat Owners

Owner's name: _____

Cat's name: _____ Date: _____

Resolving house-soiling problems may require making changes to several aspects of a cat's home environment and care. All the changes are interrelated. They will help to provide the optimal litter box/tray and decrease stress by meeting the cat's other social and environmental needs. They may also include medical treatments and diet suggestions. **Please make the following changes in your cat's home environment, as indicated by the checked boxes.**

Environmental management

1 Number, location and design of litter boxes:

Provide _____ additional litter boxes making a household total of _____. Offer some large (1½ times the cat's length from nose to base of tail) deep, open boxes. Storage containers, sweater boxes and concrete mixing trays are examples. If necessary, cut a door in one end and cover edge with duct tape to avoid sharp edges. Your cat may prefer a hooded litter box if it is kept scrupulously clean.

If your cat often urinates over the edge of the litter box, put plastic covered by newspaper around the litter box to absorb the urine. A rigid sheet of plastic cut so that it can be positioned vertically inside the box can protect adjacent surfaces.

Put the litter boxes in separate locations around the house, ideally in quiet private places that are easy for a cat to access. Locate litter boxes where the cat needs them, such as in previously soiled sites, and in areas separate from other pets' locations. Avoid high traffic or remote areas.

This is the recommended litter box plan for your home. See house floor plan in the Cat Owner Questionnaire for clarity if needed.

	Type of litter	Location
Box 1:	_____	_____
Box 2:	_____	_____
Box 3:	_____	_____
Box 4:	_____	_____

2 Types of litter:

Offer a variety of litter types and allow your cat to choose its favorite. Cats most commonly prefer fine-textured unscented clumping litters. Brand: _____

In addition, examples of alternative litters include play sand, potting soil or peat moss, or a piece of carpet or other soft material used as a temporary measure only and in select cases.

3 Scooping and changing litter:

Scoop the litter box daily and replenish litter. **Wash the box every _____ weeks and replace the litter.** *(Some behaviorists feel that weekly washing and replacing the litter is optimal. Others find that every 2–4 weeks does not compromise the cat's response. Rarely because of a particularly difficult to control urinary tract infection, daily washing of the litter box may be recommended.)*

Use soap and hot water only; avoid strong chemicals or any ammonia-based products.

4 Litter attractants:

Herbal products for this use are available in the US (but may not be available in other countries).

An alternative is to sprinkle a small amount of the cat's urine-soiled litter on top of the clean litter.

5 Synthetic pheromone sprays or plug-ins:

Use a spray or plug-in diffuser in areas we have marked on your house floor plan. Spray vertical surfaces



- 1–2 feet (up to 0.5 m) from the floor three times daily; use the diffuser 24 hours a day. Replace diffuser refill unit monthly, or sooner if the top of the brown wick becomes pale tan in color.
- 6 Ensure vertical spaces for resting or hiding places are available to cats.
Use shelves, cat condos or trees to increase separation among cats. The more perceived space, the less stress cats undergo. Provide cardboard boxes and other cozy containers for resting places.
 - 7 For cats needing increased opportunities for play and predatory behavior, increase window access by using cat trees and shelves.
 - 8 If outside cats seem to be the stimulus for marking behavior, minimize exposure to them. Block the view through windows by applying something your cat cannot see through or prevent access to the window. Options include opaque glass decorating sprays, static film, or taping on paper or translucent window coverings. Put rough surface mats outside sliding doors to discourage other animals from resting there. If your cat lives indoors or does not leave the premises, use motion-activated water sprinklers at the perimeter of the yard to deter animals from entering the area.
 - 9 Put clothing away rather than leaving it on the floor or accessible to your cat.
 - 10 Place shoes, backpacks and luggage with unfamiliar odors off the floor and out of your cat's reach.
 - 11 Clean outside doors and walls where outdoor cats are spraying. Block drafts to prevent odors from penetrating indoors.
 - 12 Deny access to affected areas if possible or place an item in the affected area that may discourage house-soiling. For example, food and water bowls placed in the soiled areas may discourage soiling; battery-operated motion-activated lights may illuminate dark private areas that a cat previously soiled.
 - 13 Other recommended environmental changes: _____

Behavior management

Behavior modification efforts should focus on positive reinforcement of desired behaviors. Physically punishing a cat during or after house-soiling only creates stress and increases the motivation to continue the behavior. Punishment can lead to fear-related aggression and will almost always reduce the bond between a cat and owner. Punishment also tends to encourage house-soiling in less obvious areas.

- 1 If you catch your cat in the act of house-soiling, sneakily distract but do not scare it with noise that is not associated with humans, such as a whistle or by rattling coins in a can. Use your cat's temperament as a guide to how loud this noise should be.
- 2 Praise your cat if you see it using the litter box. Keep a supply of treats near litter box stations for use as rewards.
- 3 Confine your cat in a single room according to the following timetable:
At all times
When you are unable to supervise the cat
When the cat is separated from other pets
Whenever your cat is confined, provide food, water and two litter boxes.
- 4 Make sure that adults, children, noisy appliances or assertive cats do not block traffic patterns or a cat's access to litter boxes, especially in the case of timid or anxious cats.
- 5 Place a bell on the collar of the most assertive cat in the house.
- 6 Set up multiple (_____) food and water stations in the following locations (see floor plan for clarification if needed): _____



Cleaning soiled areas

Many products are available for cleaning areas affected by house-soiling. Urine will fluoresce in the dark under ultraviolet light. Use a black light from a poster store to find soiled areas. Clean affected areas with a good quality urine odor and stain remover according to the type of surface that the cat has soiled. **Test products on an inconspicuous area first.** Always ensure that you clean a sufficiently large area to remove the odor – this may be up to three times the diameter of a fresh wet patch or stain.

- 1 **Carpets:** Chemical, bacterial-based and enzyme-based cleaners can all be effective when used as directed. Scrubbing the area with a 10% solution of biological washing powder (enzyme-based laundry detergent) to remove the protein content of urine, allowing area to dry and then spraying with isopropyl alcohol to remove the fat component is also effective. You may need to pull the carpet up for several days and treat the subflooring/underlay again using either a specifically designated cleaner or both the washing powder and isopropyl alcohol. If the padding under the carpet is soiled, cut out the affected area and replace with new padding. Use a concrete sealer if appropriate or a polyurethane or other sealant product if there is wood subflooring/underlay. Treat the back of the carpet with urine odor remover and tack the carpet back down.
- 2 **Concrete:** If allowed in your area, use a sodium hypochlorite bleach (1 tablespoon per gallon of water) to wash a concrete floor. Make sure the area is well ventilated, and eyes and hands are protected. Avoid all ammonia-containing cleaners.
- 3 **Wooden baseboards/skirting boards:** Use a wood soap then seal the edge of the board to the wall with a silicone sealer.
- 4 **Walls:** Use a product designed for urine and stain removal.
- 5 **Bedding:** Launder in washing machine using your usual soap or detergent; add a peroxide-based bleaching agent, if available.
- 6 **Upholstery:** Use products designed for these materials; for example, fabric or leather cleaners.

Medical testing

Urinalysis results:	Normal	Abnormal (blood, crystals, bacteria)
	Very concentrated	Other: _____

Urine culture: _____

Blood panel: _____

X-ray/ultrasound: _____

Medical treatment

Treat for lower urinary tract disease: _____

Treat for constipation: _____

Treat for diarrhea: _____

Treat for kidney disease: _____

Treat for other medical condition: _____

Dietary changes needed (see below)

Antibiotic: _____

Pain medication: _____



Other: _____

Treat with anti-anxiety medication: _____

NOTE: There are no anti-anxiety medications approved for use in cats. These drugs are prescribed for feline use as an extra-label application. Anti-anxiety drugs may cause side effects such as sedation, dilated pupils, weight gain, diabetes, increased appetite, liver and kidney disease, and cardiac arrhythmias. Do not change the medication dosing or frequency without consulting with your veterinarian. Laboratory tests are required before and during the use of many of these medications. Keep these medications out of the reach of children.

Give: _____ times a day.

Other side effects that can be seen with this medication include: _____

Full effects may take up to 4–6 weeks to be seen.

Clinical examination and blood tests must be performed before using this medication and every _____ months thereafter due to potential liver and kidney side effects.

Other treatments: _____

Dietary changes

Gradually change to the diet recommended below. We can offer you suggestions on how to make the change if needed.

Change to: _____ Canned _____ Dry

Prescription: _____

Non-prescription: _____

Other: _____

Sequentially offer the new foods we send home with you. Please purchase more of the prescription diet that your cat prefers and continue your cat on the prescription food until _____ (date). Note: Do not stop feeding the prescription diet unless directed to do so. Most cats will have further health difficulties on regular dry foods. If your cat will not eat the prescribed diet please contact us!

Dilution is the solution! Mix canned food with water to make a slurry consistency or 'kitty soup'. Warming may improve palatability.

Give _____ 12 cc (12 ml) syringes of water daily by mouth to dilute your cat's urine if it will not eat canned food.

Increase active feeding by placing food in toys or using puzzle toys to dispense food.

Follow-up

Medical progress exam and repeat urinalysis and/or blood panel on: _____ (date)

Call with progress report on: _____ (date)

Other follow-up actions: _____



These take-home instructions accompany the 'AAFP and ISFM Guidelines for Diagnosing and Solving House-Soiling Behavior in Cats', published in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*, July 2014, Volume 16, pp 579–598.



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