Curing the Litter Box Blues: Feline Elimination Disorders

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HUMANE SOCIETY VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

- National veterinary medical association, founded in 2008
- Focus: animal health & welfare
- Affiliate of The Humane Society of the United States
- Separate 501C3 organization with own Board of Directors and Leadership Council
- Over 3800 members

HUMANE SOCIETY VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

ADVOCATE
- Animal advocacy and public outreach

EDUCATE
- Education for veterinary students
- CE for professional practitioners

SERVE
- Field Services direct care opportunities
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PRESENTATION EVALUATION

Before you log off, please take 5 minutes to give us feedback on today’s presentation at: surveymonkey.com/s/felinewebinar

Those who complete the survey will have the chance to win a copy of the HSUS Complete Guide to Cat Care!

AGENDA

• General information
• Inappropriate elimination vs. urine marking
• Causes
• Resolving feline behavior problems
• Diagnosis and treatment
• Shelter program

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Web site: www.HSVMA.org
GENERAL INFORMATION

- Definition of “elimination disorder”
  - Do not use litter box for urination and/or defecation
- Prevalence: Widespread
  - THE most common behavioral problem of cats
  - 40 – 75% of all cats presented with behavior problems
- Impact on human-animal bond
  - Can strain the relationship to the breaking point
- Can almost always be managed and resolved!

INAPPROPRIATE ELIMINATION vs. URINE MARKING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inappropriate elimination</th>
<th>Urine marking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only horizontal surfaces</td>
<td>Mostly vertical surfaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deposit large amounts</td>
<td>Deposit small amounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squatting posture</td>
<td>Display a typical posture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May eliminate both inside and outside litter box</td>
<td>Normal behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May use box for urination or defecation only</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ELIMINATION vs. URINE MARKING

Postures

Elimination | Urine marking
---|---

[Images of a cat using a litter box and standing in a vertical position]
CAUSES

• Several factors may be involved
• What is initiated by one factor may continued by another
• Two general behavioral categories:
  1. Dislike of the litter box
  2. Stress-related misbehavior

CAUSES — EXAMPLES

• Medical problem(s) (e.g., urinary tract infection)
• Infrequent cleaning
• Substrate aversion
• Litter box location
• Residual odor in inappropriate areas
• Negative association(s) with litter box
• Change of residents in the house (two and four-legged)
• Change in home and/or furnishings
• Change in daily routine
• Outdoor stressors

RESOLVING FELINE BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

• Cause ⇒ Artifical social situations
• Involves the slow reshaping of the cat’s natural behaviors
• To solve the problem, must understand the problem
• MUST rule out physical problems first
**DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT**

- Behavioral history
- Medical/Physiological problems
- Environmental changes
  - Attraction therapy
  - Aversion therapy
- Behavioral modification
  - Shaping the cat's behavior
- Behavioral products
- Behavioral pharmacology

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**BEHAVIORAL HISTORY**

- Thorough behavioral history
  - Essential to a successful diagnosis and behavioral therapy program
- Include the following information:
  - Amount of time spent outside
  - Outdoor stressors?
  - Brand and type of litter used
  - Number and location of litter boxes
  - Style of litter boxes
  - Covers and liners used?
  - Frequency of scooping and cleaning
  - Areas and surfaces that are soiled
  - Products used to clean litter box and soiled areas
  - History of urinary tract problems?
- Have client complete questionnaire prior to appointment

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**MEDICAL/PHYSIOLOGICAL PROBLEMS**

- Minimal database for inappropriate urination/urine marking
  - Physical exam
  - Determination of neuter status
  - Urinalysis via cystocentesis
  - +/- urine culture, abdominal radiographs
- Minimal database for inappropriate defecation
  - Physical exam (including a rectal exam)
  - Determination of neuter status
  - Fecal exam (floatation and smear)
  - +/- Expressing of anal sacs and cytological evaluation of contents
- Other tests may be warranted (e.g., Blood Glucose, BUN, Creatinine, thyroid level)
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MEDICAL/PHYSIOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

• Check neuter status

MEDICAL/PHYSIOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

• Spay/Neuter unaltered pets!
  – 90% of male cats no longer mark after neutering
  – 95% of female cats no longer mark after spaying

MEDICAL/PHYSIOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Even when a physical diagnosis is made, behavioral therapy may be needed in addition to medical treatment since behavioral problems can arise as a result of negative conditioning

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ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES
Attraction Therapy

Attraction Therapy: Making Litter Box More Attractive – Encourages Cat

- Scoop out litter boxes daily
- Clean litter boxes on a regular schedule
- Try a variety of litter box styles and sizes – larger the better
- Provide at least one litter box per cat (may share)
- Provide at least one litter box for every level of the house
- Place litter boxes in private accessible locations
- Remove litter box covers and liners
- Use unscented litter; clumping preferred
- Purchase new litter box(s)
- Move food and water bowls away from the litter box sites
- Offer a variety of litter depths in different litter boxes

ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES
Attraction Therapy

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ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES
Attraction Therapy

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  – The larger the better

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ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES
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ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Attraction Therapy

• Offer a variety of litter depths in different litter boxes

Aversion Therapy

Aversion Therapy: Making Unsuitable Sites Undesirable – Discourages Cat

• Place deterrents at the soiled area site(s)

• Clean soiled areas with a cleaner that is specifically formulated to break down (neutralize) urine and/or stool

• If possible, make area being soiled inaccessible

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ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES
Aversion Therapy

• Clean soiled areas with a cleaner that is specifically formulated to break down (neutralize) urine and/or stool

![Cleaner Products]

ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES
Aversion Therapy

• If possible, make area being soiled inaccessible

![Access Denied]

BEHAVIORAL MODIFICATION
Shaping the Cat's Behavior

• Take cat to the litter box frequently ⇒ praise use
• Do not use physical punishment
• Temporarily place a litter box over the soiled area(s)
• Avoid, eliminate, or at least reduce awareness of outdoor stressors
• If caught in the act ⇒ interrupt and redirect
• Multi-cat household ⇒ create an "atmosphere of plenty"
• Confine cat to a small area
• Keep a behavioral diary
• For inappropriate defecation, feed the cat twice a day
**BEHAVIORAL PRODUCTS**

- Feliway® Pheromone Spray and Diffuser
- Cat Attract™ Litter or Cat Attract™ Litter Additive

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**BEHAVIORAL PHARMACOLOGY**

- *Only an adjunct to treatment plan*
- Usually more successful for motivated behavior (e.g., urine spraying) and stressed animals
- No drugs approved by the FDA for the treatment of inappropriate elimination in cats
- Many psychotropic drugs have human abuse potential

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**BEHAVIORAL PHARMACOLOGY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug Class</th>
<th>Drug Name</th>
<th>Dose for Cats (PO)</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>Potential Side Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antidepressive</td>
<td>Buspirone</td>
<td>0.5 – 1.0 mg/kg</td>
<td>SID/TID</td>
<td>Irritability, aggression, alterations in social behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antidepressive</td>
<td>Fluoxetine</td>
<td>0.5 – 1.0 mg/kg</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>Sleep disturbances, irritability, anorexia, changes in elimination patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antidepressive</td>
<td>Paroxetine</td>
<td>0.5 – 1.0 mg/kg</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>Sleep disturbances, irritability, anorexia, changes in elimination patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antidepressive</td>
<td>Amitriptyline</td>
<td>0.2 – 0.5 mg/kg</td>
<td>BID/TID</td>
<td>Sedation, anticholinergic effects, cardiac conduction disturbances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antidepressive</td>
<td>Clomipramine</td>
<td>0.3 – 0.5 mg/kg</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>Sedation, anticholinergic effects, cardiac conduction disturbances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: SID = Once per day, BID = Twice per day, TID = Three times per day
SHELTER PROGRAM

• Identifying litter box problems in the shelter
• Medical/Physiological problems
• Treatment — how?
  – Environmental changes
    • Attraction therapy
    • Aversion therapy
  – Behavioral modification
    • Shaping the cats behavior
    – Behavioral products
    – Behavioral pharmacology
• Placement

IDENTIFYING LITTER BOX PROBLEMS IN THE SHELTER

• Intake questionnaire
  – Include questions about history of litter box use
  – Can be used as a screening tool
  – Example:
    • Cat Intake Profile from Animal Rescue League of Boston
      http://www.arlboston.org

• Intake interview
  – Opportunity to develop rapport
  – Questions are not “blaming” ⇒ Help manage the cat

IDENTIFYING LITTER BOX PROBLEMS IN THE SHELTER

• Observation of enclosure behavior
  – Litter box “misuse” often not demonstrated
MEDICAL/PHYSIOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

- Minimal database for inappropriate urination/urine marking
  - Physical exam
  - Determination of neuter status
  - Urinalysis via cystocentesis
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- Minimal database for inappropriate defecation
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  - Fecal exam (floatation and smear)
  - +/- expressing of anal sacs and cytopathological evaluation of contents

- Other tests may be warranted (e.g., Blood Glucose, BUN, Creatinine, thyroid level)

TREATMENT — FOSTER CARE

- Strongly recommended
- Keep cat in one room
- Monitor and record elimination (in and out of box)
- Follow cleaning and environmental recommendations
- If no problems after two weeks, gradually allow access to rest of home
  - Continue to monitor
- If no problems after additional two weeks, put up for adoption

TREATMENT — IN SHELTER

- Keep in "real life" room or large cat condo
- Monitor and record elimination (in and out of box)
- Follow cleaning and environmental recommendations
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TREATMENT

Remember, lack of a problem in a shelter (or foster care) does not guarantee that the problem would not happen in an adoptive home.

The Good News!
Following standard recommendations usually prevents reoccurrence.

PLACEMENT

• Ideal home:
  – Single cat household
  – Minimal outdoor activity/stressors
  – Quiet household
  – Adopter willing and able to follow standard litter box environmental recommendations

  ➔ MOST IMPORTANT

Adoption Counseling

• Full disclosure regarding cat's history
• Offer "foster to adopt" as an option
• Education! Education! Education!
• Follow-up

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QUESTIONS?