



Dr. Cecilia Ho, DVM

Dr. Cecilia Ho is a graduate of the College of Veterinary Medicine at Michigan State University. She decided to specialize in feline medicine two years into private practice as she found feline medicine to be more challenging and rewarding.

She currently shares her home with five cats- all of which have her trained to their beck and call.

THE LITTERBOX - Best Friend or Ticking Time-Bomb?

We've all been there before. The litterbox is spotless (to our eyes and nose), you've scooped diligently this morning before leaving for work and yet kitty has left a nice little "gift" on the carpet, in the middle of the dining-room for the second day in a row. What could have gone wrong? Why don't you like your litterbox anymore you ask your cat imploringly? You had bought the litter on sale. So it was a little dusty with a strong perfume scent, but it had been on sale!

Even though we may chuckle to ourselves and nod our heads in commiseration, litterbox avoidance has serious consequences. **It is still the most common reason why cats are surrendered to animal shelters.** Because of their history of litterbox avoidance, most of them are deemed unadoptable and are euthanized. Hopefully the following information will help clear up some of the misunderstanding between cats and litterboxes.



Firstly, cats like consistency. If you have a litter type and brand that your cat is using faithfully - **DO NOT CHANGE IT!** Resist the temptation of buying a litter that is on sale if it's different from the one that you're using. Don't be tempted when you see a bag of litter at the store that says your cat will love it. Chances are your cat will hate it and show its displeasure by leaving another "present" on the dining-room carpet.

Most cats prefer unscented, clumping litter. These types of litter are usually very fine textured and are highly absorbent. This translates into a material that won't hurt your cat's paws while it's digging and standing in the litterbox. It also means that urine wicks away quickly so it won't clump the cat's fur and make it unpleasant to urinate in the litterbox. The substrate type doesn't matter. It can be clay, pine, corn etc. as long as it's a litter that your cat uses consistently (see preceding paragraph).

Cats also prefer litterboxes without covers. The litterbox should also be long and wide enough for the cat to fully stand in and be able to turn around without flipping on its head. The sides of the box should just be high enough to allow your cat easy access. This is especially important for older cats that suffer from arthritis. The litterbox should be placed in a quiet area of the house with little foot traffic. It is also important that your cat can get to the box without having to run through an obstacle course. Multi-level homes should ideally have a litterbox on each level of the house. This is especially true as your cat ages and has a harder time getting around.

There should be sufficient litterboxes for every cat in the house. The rule of thumb is one litterbox for each cat plus one extra. In multi-cat households it's important to place the boxes in different locations within the house. Separating the boxes rather than grouping them in one area allows the more submissive and shy cats to use the litterbox without being bullied by the more dominant cats.

Finally litterbox maintenance is critical for a happy household with a cat. All boxes should be scooped at least once daily, preferably twice. All the boxes should also be cleaned and the litter changed at least once weekly. Litterboxes should be washed and cleaned with a mild detergent (non-scented Ivory dish soap works well), rinsed and dried before fresh litter is added. This point cannot be stressed enough. Consider scooping the litterbox the equivalent of flushing the toilet. Would you want to use a toilet that hasn't been flushed in two, three or four days? If the answer is no and hopefully it is, then neither does your cat.

These are just a few pointers that may help you keep your cat happy with its litterbox. If the litterbox avoidance persists despite your best efforts please call your veterinarian for help immediately. Your cat may have a serious medical problem. Do not wait. The longer the problem continues, the more difficult it will be to resolve.

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