

# Cat Spraying

Basic Feline Care



## CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

Your cat backs up to an object with the tail lifted vertically and sprays a fine mist of urine from beneath his tail. What is happening and how do you prevent it?

**Spraying** Spraying is not a litter box problem; it is an important part of nonverbal communication among cats to establish and define boundaries. Cats spray either to mark territory or to express unhappiness about changes going on around them. Cats mark their territory in several different ways: by scratching, rubbing against an object, or spraying.

Urine marking (spraying) is different from a housetraining problem. The cat backs up to an object, points its tail straight up in the air, and sprays a nasty, smelly shot of urine. Both males and females spray, though most often a male cat is the offender. There are several approaches to solving this problem, and you may have to try them all.

If your cats are not spayed or neutered, get it done immediately. Sexual excitement often triggers marking behavior. A passing cat outside is enough to start it. Altering by six months of age prevents the habit from developing. An unneutered male or a female in heat can be especially obnoxious howling, trying to get outdoors, and spraying the door because of frustration. Spayed or neutered cats can still spray, although they typically do not.

Changes of any kind in your cat's environment can also trigger a bout of spraying, as he expresses his frustration, confusion, and stress. Some situations that can cause a cat to begin spraying:

- Moving to a new home
- Getting a new cat or dog
- A new baby or family member
- New furniture or rearranging
- Moving the litter box
- Dirty litter box
- Changing brands of litter

As you see, cats are very sensitive and don't have a lot of ways to tell you about their unhappiness.

**Where cats will spray:** Corners of vertical objects are a cat's favorite. He will choose a chair or table leg, a wall, the edge of a door, and just about any other thing he can back up to and get a good aim. Punishment only will upset him more, so there is not much you can do unless you can stop him in the act. If you see your cat lining up to spray, a squirt from a water pistol from across the room will interrupt him. Don't say a word. If you're lucky, he won't associate the correction with you, and it will prevent future spraying in that spot. You can then distract him with some attention or playtime.

### Equipment Needed

- Odor remover
- Pet repellent spray
- Carpet shampoo
- Cleaning Dry Powders
- Cleaning Mineral Rock Products
- Cleaning Enzymal Products
- Cleaning Enzyme/Bacteria Kits
- Aluminum foil

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**What you can do** Clean sprayed areas and treat with an odor remover. Do not use ammonia or bleach because the odor is similar to urine. The smell may encourage the cat to spray on the same spot again. Try some of these products to clean and deodorize areas.

Product Type	How It Works	Where It Works
Carpet Shampoo	Detergent cleaning action.	Only when the stain is very fresh.
Dry Powders	Uses super absorbency to remove stains and odors.	Upholstery, wood, linoleum, concrete. Not as effective with carpets.
Mineral Rock Products	Absorbs stain and odor molecules by exchanging electrically charged particles.	Any smooth surface. Not as effective with carpets.
Enzymal Products	Uses enzymes to break down the odor-causing compounds.	Carpets, concrete, wood, linoleum, upholstery.
Enzyme/Bacteria Kits	Uses enzymes to break down odor-causing compounds and then bacteria to "eat them."	Carpets, upholstery, concrete, wood, linoleum.

To discourage repeat spraying, apply a pet repellent and cover the spot with aluminum foil. Cats are very annoyed by the sound of urine hitting foil and usually will leave it alone.

Sometimes confining your pet to a private room for a few days will break the cycle of spraying and give him a chance to get over what is bothering him.

Medical intervention is often needed to cure spraying. Your veterinarian may prescribe hormones or a mild tranquilizer. There are products available that may help relieve stress and sometimes helps to cure furniture scratching too. Spray the spot, not the cat.

Consider a consultation with a behavior specialist in your home. An expert can assess your situation unemotionally and may suggest some practical solutions you have not thought of. Contact your vet, local veterinary specialty hospital or university for a referral.

### Suggested Reading

*Cats For Dummies* by Gina Spadafori and Paul Diono, DVM, DACVIM

*The Complete Idiot's Guide to Living With a Cat* by Carolyn Janik and Ruth Rejnes

*ASPCA's Complete Cat Care*

*Shelter Cats* by Carolyn Commings

*How to Get Your Cat to Do What You Want* by Warren Eckstein