So my cat is inappropriately urinating

What causes inappropriate urination and how common is it?
Inappropriate urination (and occasionally defecation) is the most common behavioral problem in cats. About 1 in 10 cats will inappropriately urinate. There are three main types of inappropriate urination:

- **Medical causes** - this must be ruled out first in every patient and includes things like idiopathic cystitis, urinary tract infection, and urinary bladder stones. Diagnostics include at minimum a complete exam and urinalysis. Please refer to our lower urinary tract disease handout for more information.
- **Toileting** - patients with a toileting cause for inappropriate urination find a location other than their litter box for urination and/or defecation.
- **Urine marking** - patients who are urine marking are trying to communicate a message via their urine.

How is toileting different from urine marking (spraying?)
It can be challenging to differentiate toileting versus marking but it is crucial to target treatment.

- **Toileting**
  - Many of the causes for inappropriate elimination center around the litter box or getting to the litter box.
  - Something about the litter box or the box locations is displeasing to the cat and thus the cat finds a new more satisfactory place to urinate and/or defeceate.
  - Many patients will develop a substrate preference meaning they tend to urinate on the same type of surface – for example the bathmat or clothes left on the floor.
  - Some patients will even urinate right outside of the litter box.
  - May occur if two cats in the household do not get along and one cat blocks the other from the litter box.

- **Urine Marking**
  - Litter box is satisfactory and is used by the cat in question.
  - Urine marking is a normal communication behavior in cats, which we find (with good reason) unacceptable in our home.
  - May occur when cats in the household do not get along or with outside triggers (scents or visualization of another cat).
  - Urine marking tends to be on vertical surfaces with the characteristic tail shaking behavior although this is not always true.
  - Usually does not include defecation.
  - Neutering a male will help decrease urine marking but does not always eliminate the behavior.
  - Females can also urine mark although it happens less frequently.

How is behavioral inappropriate urination diagnosed?
The first step in diagnosing a behavior cause for inappropriate urination is to rule out a medical cause. Each patient with inappropriate urination should have a full physical examination and a urinalysis performed. For some patients further testing - such as an abdominal x-ray to look for urinary bladder stones - will need to be completed. A full thorough history will usually reveal a suspicion for either toileting or urine marking.
How is toileting managed/ treated?
The treatment/management for a cat with a toileting behavior centers around creating a better litter box experience for the individual. Cats can have preferences for types of litter, covered versus uncovered litter boxes, and location of boxes. Some basic starting points:

- Scoop litter boxes daily with weekly to biweekly full cleaning of litter boxes.
- Have one more litter box than cats in the household- for example if you have four cats you should have five litter boxes.
- Litter boxes should be accessible- this means boxes on every floor of the house, not placing boxes in hard to access locations or locations with only one entry/exit area. Place boxes in areas where the cat is already inappropriately urinating/defecating. Spreading out the boxes (two boxes in the same room act as one large box as the cat has to pass all the same things to access the boxes)
- Provide big litter boxes.
- Provide clay clumping litter- for the majority of the cats in this region of the world clay clumping litter is preferred. The litter should also be deep enough for the cat to properly dig and cover their scent.
- Occasionally even with the behavior modification listed above a problem is still present and we need to turn to supplement or anti-depressants. Anti-depressants, such as Prozac (fluoxetine) work best when accompanied with the behavior modification programs as mentioned above. We require yearly blood work for any cat on chronic prescription medication. It is important to remember not every cat responds to every anti-depressant so it may take multiple medication trials before the right product is found. Finally it can take 6-8 weeks for anti-depressants to start working. Please talk to us if you think this is your cat.

How is urine marking managed?
Urine marking can be challenging to manage in some cases and centers around decreasing the cats need to communicate.

- If your cat is not spayed or neutered this should be the first step.
- Remove triggers- this varies from cat to cat. For some cats it may be interactions with a cat in the house requiring segregation of cats who don’t get along. For others it may be seeing a dog/cat outside requiring obstructing the windows that allow visualization outside.
- Consider natural calming supplements such as zylkene/ solliquin and use feliway. Please ask us more about these products!
- Provide extra resources: This includes food and water stations, scratching posts, litter boxes, napping spots, hiding spots, etc. The general rule of thumb is one more item than the number of cats to decrease any chance of competition.
- Finally if all of the options above have been utilized and urine marking/spraying continues to occur anti-depressants may be required. Anti-depressants, such as Prozac (fluoxetine) work best when accompanied with behavior modification programs as mentioned above. We require yearly blood work for any cat on chronic prescription medication. It is important to remember not every cat responds to every anti-depressant so it may take multiple medication trials before the right product is found. Finally it can take 6-8 weeks for anti-depressants to start working.

Follow up
Inappropriate urination/defecation can be very frustrating! Please do not give up hope. It often requires lots of close communication between you and us so please call with any questions or concerns and with regular progress updates. Additionally we have more handouts if desired.

Sources:
- Lecture notes- Feline House-soiling Dr. Jacqueline Neilson, DVM, DACVB
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