

A NEW CATTITUDE

6 Common Litter Box No-No's

BY RITA REIMERS

Litter boxes can quickly become the bane of a cat owner's existence when kitty decides to misuse them — or not use them at all. These are some of the most common litter box misbehaviors I have come across, both in my practice and with my own cats.

1 Avoiding the litter box

Litter box avoidance is the most common issue cat owners experience, and it's the No. 1 reason people surrender their cats to shelters. There are many reasons why your cat could be ducking the box, and most of them have simple solutions:

- **Medical issues.** When your cat isn't using the litter box, the first thing to do is take him to the veterinarian. Medical issues, like urinary tract disorders, are a common reason for a cat to stop using his box.
- **Litter box size.** Ideally, your cat's box should be large enough for him to comfortably turn around inside, without his body hanging over the side.
- **Box placement.** The box should be in a low-traffic area of your home but not somewhere difficult for your cat to reach. If you have a senior cat, put a box on every level of your home, so he can get to a box quickly and easily.

→ **Stress.** Household changes can quickly cause stress in your cat, and peeing outside of the litter box is commonly the first sign. Adding new people or pets to the household is a common cat stressor.

→ **Not enough boxes — or not clean enough.** If there aren't enough boxes in a multi-cat household, or if they are not scooped often enough, your cats will find another, cleaner place to go. And I guarantee it won't be someplace you'll like. Scoop your litter boxes often, at least twice a day, and offer the same number of boxes as you have cats and one extra.

2 Guarding the litter box

Alpha cats will often demonstrate their dominance by preventing another cat from either entering or exiting the litter box. Our cat, BooBoo, is our alpha boy, and more than once I have seen him trap our cat, Hope, as she's using the box. Litter box bullying can quickly lead

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to litter box avoidance, so provide boxes in different areas of your home and make sure each area has an easy escape path for bullied cats.

3 Litter box playtime

Most common with kittens, I have seen littermates follow each other into the box and turn potty time into playtime. Sometimes this continues into adulthood, often between siblings. But some adult cats play in the litter, too. One of my client's cats takes her favorite stuffed animal with her everywhere she goes, including into the litter box. My own Abby will often climb into a freshly cleaned and filled litter box and roll around with glee in the unspoiled litter. I don't pretend to understand that one!

4 Standing on the rim

My cat, Sunny, has this habit of standing on the rim of the litter box on his hind legs while leaning against the adjacent wall with his upper body when he uses the litter box. It's the oddest way I have ever seen a cat use the box. Sometimes it's successful. Other times he makes a huge mess, either because he misses the box and goes on the floor or because he loses his balance and tips the box over, dumping its entire contents. I'm often left with a mess to clean up, but I can't help but laugh every time I see Sunny getting himself "into position."

5 Refusal to bury

Cats are known for being ultraclean and for burying their leavings, but there are times when a cat decides not to bury. Sometimes this happens when a cat doesn't

like the texture and feel of a certain type of litter on his paws; declawed cats will often experience this. Sometimes the alpha cat won't bury as another way to mark his territory and let everyone know he's been there. When my BooBoo does this, my Tinkerbelle goes right in there and covers it up for him!

6 Digging and over-burying

Some cats are so intent on burying that they excavate the box for a long time before they are satisfied. My Tinkerbelle buries everything under a pile of litter so high that it actually looks like a pyramid. It takes her a good five minutes to accomplish this. I once took care of a cat named Wilbur who used to pee on the floor, then he would get into the litter box and scoop all the litter out onto the floor to bury what he did. (He actually needed a larger litter box, and the problem was solved!)

If your beloved kitty is exhibiting odd behaviors in the litter box and medical causes have been ruled out, consult with a cat behaviorist to help find a solution to the bad box behavior. Or, depending on your cat's particular misbehavior, you might want to just sit back and enjoy the show!



Rita Reimers' Cat Behavior Coaching has helped many cat owners better understand their feline

friends. Visit RitaReimers.com to read her cat behavior blog or book a cat behavior coaching session. Rita is also CEO/owner of JustForCatsPetSitting.com. Connect with her on Facebook and on Twitter at [@TheCatAnalyst](https://twitter.com/TheCatAnalyst).