

## **Cat Focus Month Five – Urinary Issues**

Previously, we outlined the importance of once-per-year cat exams as well as twice-per-year exams for senior cats over 7 years old. These exams are vital to maintaining cat health year round. In our first cat-focused article in this series, we discussed the importance of yearly bloodwork for all cats. Month three, we talked about obesity in cats. In month four, we identified how to keep your outdoor feline safe. This month we will talk about urinary issues in cats.

### **Litter box Habits**

One of the main reasons cats are given up, surrendered to shelters or euthanized is due to inappropriate urination, outside of the litter box. As humans we try to conform a cat's natural behavior to fit into our lives. Cats do not always prefer what we do. There have been extensive studies to identify what a cat prefers for its litter box. If we are aware of this, we can avoid accidents outside of the box. Many people report they have always had the litter box a certain way, and just recently the cat is going outside the box. As cats get older, they get less tolerant of less than ideal situations. Also, medical conditions and arthritis can change how a cat behaves.

1. The litter box should be uncovered-a cover traps scents and a cat's nose is much more sensitive than ours.
2. Go without a litter box liner.
3. The litter box should be at least 1.5 times the length of the cat (not including the tail), the cat should have plenty of room. It is very hard to find large litter boxes. An easy tip is to use a large plastic tote, take off the lid and cut an entrance hole. The high sides prevent litter from getting kicked out of the box.
4. Cats prefer a clumping unscented litter. Since their noses are very sensitive, any perfume is offensive. The litter needs to clearly state 'unscented' or else it usually has perfumes added.
5. Cats prefer deeper litter of at least a couple inches thick.
6. Quiet location: cats can easily become scared by noises from washing machines, water heaters, people traffic etc. Keep the litter box in a quiet out of the way area.
7. The general rule for number of litter boxes is 1 box for every cat + 1. For example: 2 cats in the household you should have 3 boxes. Often, cats prefer to urinate in 1 box and defecate in another.
8. The litter box should be scooped daily and thoroughly cleaned at least monthly.
9. Especially for older cats, it is ideal to have at least one litter box for each story of the house. Often, older pets with arthritis have trouble climbing stairs to get to a litter box

### **Male Cats-Urinary Blockage**

There are many medical reasons for urination outside of the litter box. It is always best to have your cat examined by a veterinarian to have some basic tests done such as a urinalysis and bloodwork to check organ function. One condition that is serious and potentially deadly, if not caught early, is urinary blockage in male cats. Male cats have a very small urethra; this is the organ that the urine passes from the bladder to outside of the body. This small tube can become blocked with urinary crystals, proteins or secondary to infection (less common). Signs of a urinary blockage include: excessive licking of the hind end, frequent trips to the litter box, straining in the litter box, small amounts of urine produced, vocalizing, and blood in the urine. This is an emergency situation, and the cat should be seen by a veterinarian immediately. The longer the problem goes on the more serious and costly to treat. Male cats that have had urinary blockages are prone to this happening again and should be on a prescription urinary diet the rest of their life. At The Zimmerman Veterinary Clinic we carry Royal Canin foods that are prescription. We also have Royal Canin foods that can be purchased without a prescription for male cats that have not had any problems yet, but used as prevention.