

Dr. Kim's feline mews



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And what does a 'stressed cat' do? Send pee-mail!

Unwelcome as it seems to us, cats use their urine to send messages - to themselves, other cats, and us. Except we are not always very good at 'reading' the message and are more likely to get cross with the cat when we find the pee-mail message left on the bench or beside the door.

Cats who 'internalise' their emotions often end up with cystitis - an extreme bladder irritation that causes them to try to urinate every few minutes, and also often ends up with them peeing blood. VERY unhappy bladder and cat. Younger cats are usually responding to a social frustration while older cats (especially females over 8 years old) usually have a bacterial component and even bladder polyps.

Remember - peeing on your clothes or furniture is not a moral statement by your cat - it is not revenge (BUT it is sometimes disappointment!). Cats are, of course, amoral. However, they have very specific social and emotional constructs - and they use their urine as an 'aide memoire' or a message to 'other' - you, your family or another cat. We are breeding cats who want to bond with people - burmese and ragdolls in particular - and then we expect them to just hang around till we have time to give them attention. In one

study, the GREATEST STRESS for confined cats was to randomise their interactions with humans. Changing the person who cleaned, the time they were fed, the order they were fed in resulted in so much stress, that the study had to be stopped after two weeks on welfare grounds. The corollary is that cats with severe, chronic cystitis, once put into a regulated and enriched environment had no more symptoms of cystitis. Save yourself vet fees and drugs costs - consistency is better than medication.

So if your cat is **pee-mailing** you, call Dr Kim and get the message interpreted! For the basics though, this is a reprint of an article Dr Kim did in 2002 ! Cats haven't changed much!



The Cat isn't using the Litter Tray! HELP!

This is really breaking the unwritten rule of cat ownership, and is very distressing for everyone. It is also a very common cause of euthanasia or abandonment of cats, so is a problem to be taken very seriously.

An understanding of cat communication is essential - they are VERY SMELL ORIENTED. Cats use urine and faeces to post messages for other cats (and their humans, whom they do actually regard as being slightly incompetent cats, according to some research). Cat urine, especially, always gets attention, and if you compare it to people - some people have loud voices or shout when they want their opinion noticed, cats use urine to try to tell us about their problems and some have stronger urine than others. Also, cat urine is designed to stick on a tree in all weather for 3 weeks - and really does smell worse once outside the body! A key point here is that if a cat pees or poops on your bed, it's because they love you (usually), so take it as a compliment (!) but then move on to establishing behaviour that you can live with. The sooner the problem is addressed the better, because once there is a learned component to the behaviour, and it becomes ingrained, it is a habit and is much harder to break the cycle.

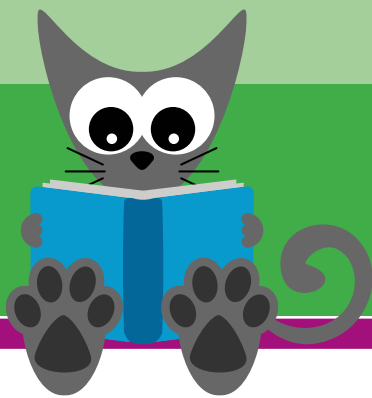
The other comparison that we make, is that where humans get 'stress headaches' or migraines, cats 'stress organ' is the bladder. If a cat can't get its message across with subtleties of body language and 'timeshare' agreements - especially with other cats, but also with new or young humans - then the next level of communication is usually with urine. Humans cannot ignore the smell of cat pee, but unfortunately the attention it draws is usually of the unpleasant, punishment kind. When a cat can't pee where it wants to - often because another cat has taken over its patch of the garden, or even the

house, then many cats (up to 10 percent of males and 5 percent of females) will start peeing or even spraying in the house in a desperate bid to defend their 'core territory'. They will even pass blood in their urine as the bladder spasms in anxiety. Once the bladder wall is damaged, the urine itself irritates the bladder lining and the problem becomes 'set in' or chronic. The cats most prone to cystitis and spraying are at the two ends of the behaviour scale - the nervous Nellie who can't make their wishes known any other way, and the very outgoing cat with a big territory to patrol. The 'ordinary' cat between these two usually just accepts its lot, but any cat can be stressed enough to make it spray.

Treatment options are many and varied, and although it is preferable to reduce or eliminate the causes whenever possible, unfortunately it is not always possible to identify or do anything about them, and often there is more than one cause. In this case, medical intervention is required.

- Prevent other cats entering - Strange cats can be kept out by fitting the resident with a magnetic collar with activates the lock on their cat door or there are even microchip activated cat flaps now! Otherwise, block off the cat flap and let your cat in and out by hand.
- Keep Litter Clean - It is always a good idea to keep litter scrupulously clean, and often an extra litter tray is all that is required, so your cat does not have to 'expose' themselves in the garden and aggravate their more territorial

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neighbour. Faeces should be removed immediately it is seen or smelt, and to completely replace the litter once a day for the very fussy cat. There are many types of litter available, from very fine gravel-type (the one about 50 percent of cats have a preference for), through several types of clumping and biodegradable types. There is a 'crystal' type litter made of sand which absorbs urine immediately - as cats evolved in the desert, this seems to be the best way to go. Be aware that a lot of cats do NOT like the 'deodorised' type as it is designed for our noses not theirs.

- Provide a Covered Litter Tray - Some cats want complete privacy for their toilette - you can try a cardboard box over the top of the tray with a door cut in it. Be aware that this makes it more difficult to see and smell waste products, and the smell can build up enough to repel the cat. Charcoal filtered covers are available.
- Clean soiled areas - For your own residential enjoyment you will probably wish to remove the sight and smell of the deposits. Removal of the odour is particularly important when soiling is done repeatedly in the same place. There are several very effective products available at from Dr Kim Cat Vet. It can, however, be up to four weeks to actually have the smell disappear for the cat - remember their noses are more sensitive than

ours, and their urine is designed to 'hang around' as a message centre. NEVER USE DISINFECTANTS (especially ammonia-based ones), as it then smells like a tiger has come and peed in their house and it upsets cats even more. The same problem arises during renovations - apparently a lot of solvents used in building and painting smell like tiger pee - and yet the tiger is never seen for the cat to be able to appease it!

- Provide extra litter trays - Put litter trays over repeatedly soiled areas. Once there is consistent use, you can merge them into one tray, and move it (very slowly, 5 cm at a time sometimes) to where you want the tray. You may need one tray per cat plus one extra in multicat households. Also place trays in secure, private places away from food and foot traffic (toilette time is very private)
- 'Loss of housetraining' is a serious problem. Cats never 'make mistakes' when it comes to using the litter tray. There is always a message for us, but because we can't always really understand their thoughts and motivations, we have to try to guess the message or the problem. Trial and error is the only way we can attempt this - it is not possible to 'get it right' first time every time. However, consistency, observation and perseverance will result in nearly every cat becoming a pleasurable pet again.

