



Marking Behaviour of Cats

Marking is what cats do to spread their scent around their home base as a non-aggressive form of asserting themselves. It also functions to keep the cat calm and decrease anxiety. Cats mark their spaces using their scent glands on their heads, faces, paws and urine. When cats use their urine to mark their home environment, they are typically feeling threatened, insecure, or are still intact.

If your cat is experiencing abnormal elimination behaviour it is best to first rule out any medical related causes with a visit to your cat's veterinarian.

How can I recognize it?

- Urine is found on the inside of external walls and areas of the home such as at windows and doors.
- Urine is found on internal surfaces such as beds, clothing, or furniture, walls near windows or doors. Can be found anywhere the cat may be feeling stressed about.
- You see your cat in a standing position, possibly with a quivering tail, urinating/spraying outside of the litter box. If the cat is spraying, it's often on vertical surfaces.

What can I do about it?

The solution depends on the reason your cat is marking.

If your cat is still **intact**.

- Most cats that are mature and still intact will display marking behaviour.
- Most cats, be they male or female, will stop spraying after a spay or neuter.

If most of the marking occurs on **external walls** of the home, your cat may be sensing an external threat.



- Consider if you have witnessed your cat agitated after seeing another animal outside through the window as this might indicate this as a stressor.
- Look for animals treading around the house, particularly near windows
- Block windows so your cat cannot see animal trespassers
- Keep windows closed so your cat cannot smell animals outside the home.
- Provide other options in the targeted locations for scent marking such as scratchers, cat trees or litter boxes.
- Use products in the yard or near windows to deter animals from coming near the home. After a few startling experiences the animal will likely not return to that location.

If your cat is spraying **various surfaces within** your home, things can be more challenging to resolve.

1. If you have a **single cat home** your cat may be experiencing anxiety. This anxiety could be due to changes in the home such as new family members (human or animal), new furniture, changes in routine, a move or a new appliance. Think of changes that your cat may have seen, experienced, heard or smelled.

To help discourage your cat from using inappropriate objects as targets for its anxiety, try to determine the underlying cause and remove easy access to marked items while promoting the use of appropriate alternatives. Overcome its anxiety due to changes within the home

- Pick up laundry or block access to laundry
- Strategically place cardboard scratchers, trees, cat beds applied with a comforting scent near locations previously marked.
- Encourage your cat to play, as a way to decrease anxiety in or near previously marked locations.

2. If you have a **multi-cat home** one of your cats may be experiencing anxiety due to conflicts with another cat. It is also possible that one or more of your cats may be anxious due to changes within the home which may include conflict with other cats or other stressors.

To help your cat overcome **social conflicts** within the home



- Isolate each cat into their own safe rooms. The only way to know for sure it is only one cat marking is to have cameras recording key areas day and night. (*See Creating a Safe Room for Your Cat*)
- Reintroduce the cats to each other. (*See the handout Introducing cats*)
- Provide each cat with positive experiences within the presence of each other. Such experiences include eating and playing.
- Add vertical spaces and ensure that each cat has its own scented structures in each space they frequent. This is particularly important in locations where marking has occurred.
- Supervise the cats when in the same space while they are getting reacquainted with each other.
- Ensure resources are not being blocked by another cat and that cats have the ability to retreat or choose an alternate route to approach resources.

Whatever the reason for your cat's marking behaviour it is important to give your home a thorough cleaning with an **enzyme remover**. Either get a black light or download an app to your phone to help you identify all locations requiring cleaning. You can also consider adding situation-appropriate pheromone diffusers to your home.

If you find you are struggling to resolve your cat's marking behaviour, you can always call our behaviour outreach line at 403-723-6019 or book a consultation via our website <https://www.calgaryhumane.ca/what-we-do/animal-training/private-consultations/>