Inappropriate urination and defecation in the cat

Alexandra Taylor

Historically, house soiling has been referred to as 'inappropriate urination or defecation', but it is now recognized that there are several causes of feline house soiling, many of which may be completely appropriate for the cat, but not acceptable to the owner. The term 'unacceptable elimination' is now deemed a more appropriate term to describe house soiling. Feline house soiling is a relatively common problem, with many owners not seeking veterinary attention or advice until the problem has become unbearable. As a result, cats may be brought into a veterinary practice to be euthanased or relinquished in rescue centres because the owners cannot cope.

Veterinary professionals are in a good position to offer both preventative and first aid behavioural advice to cat owners. Although house soiling can occur due to medical issues, prevention is better than cure, so advising new cat owners about the environmental needs of their kitten or cat can help reduce the likelihood of house soiling occurring. Ensuring the environmental needs of indoor-only cats or those with limited outdoor access are met is particularly significant. This is because there may be more competition for resources with other cats in the household, resulting in an increased likelihood of house soiling (both elimination and stress-related marking).

Providing optimum litter tray facilities is often misunderstood by cat owners, with many not realising that their cat's litter tray is too small, too dirty, poorly located, the wrong type (uncovered/covered) or too low in number for a multicat household. House soiling can occur in both male and female cats of any age and for several reasons, including poor litter facilities, medical issues and environmental factors both inside and outside of the cat's home. Medical conditions such as those causing pain or polyuria, e.g. diabetes and osteoarthritis, can result in elimination-related house soiling. All cats presented with house-soiling issues must be referred to a veterinary surgeon for a full health examination so that medical aetiology can be ruled out first. Feline idiopathic cystitis (FIC) is a common reason for house soiling and an area where veterinary professionals could help owners to manage their cats to prevent the recurrence of symptoms.

Focusing on management techniques, such as reducing the cat's weight, increasing water intake and decreasing conflict in multicat households, should be discussed with owners.

Veterinary professionals should use the 'AAFP&ISFM Guidelines for Diagnosing and Solving House-Soiling Behaviour in Cats' as a tool when faced with a house-soiling cat, as this provides a comprehensive guide (including a cat owner questionnaire) on to how these cases can be managed. Referral to a certified clinical animal behaviourist should be considered for cases that are severe, not resolved or where owner compliance is a concern.

KEY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define the different terms associated with house soiling
- Recognize and understand the different reasons why cats may house soil
- Learn what advice veterinary professionals can give owners to prevent their cat from house soiling

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What percentage of cats are euthanased in animal shelters in the USA due to house soiling?
(A) 42% (C) 62%
(B) 52% (D) 72%
2. Which one of the following statements is NOT true?
(A) Cats affected by FIC can develop litter tray aversions due to associating a tray/location with painful urination
(B) Cats living in multicat households are likely to house soil
(C) Cats always stand to urine mark (spray) and squat to urinate
(D) Large volumes of urine are associated with both elimination of urine and urine marking
3. What is the ideal litter tray size?
(A) The length of the cat from its nose to the base of its tail
(B) One and a half times the length of the cat from its nose to the base of its tail
(C) Half the length of the cat's body
(D) It doesn't matter, as long as the cats preferred litter is used

Compulsive behaviour in the dog

E. Anne McBride

Humans and non-human animals show habitual repetitive behaviours. These are normal, for example the order

in which you brush your teeth: bottom left, bottom right, top left, top right; or the route you walk to work. However, when such routines start to interfere with normal daily activities or cause physical harm to the individual then the behaviour is or is potentially becoming an issue of welfare concern.

Compulsive or obsessive compulsive behaviour, also known as stereotypic behaviour, is an abnormal expression of such excessive repetitive behaviours. However, not all problematic repetitive behaviour is in this