

WOODVALE PARK

VETERINARY HOSPITAL



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INDOOR SPRAYING PROBLEMS

Spraying is a normal act for most cats, be they male or female, desexed or entire. It is a territory marking behaviour and is usually performed against vertical objects such as fence posts and bushes, which rival cats, may encounter. It is normally restricted to the outdoors because of competition with local pets. Cats rarely spray indoors because it is usually secure from rivals and needs no further identification.

The indoor sprayer is therefore usually feeling insecure or threatened, and is trying to boost his or her own presence. Redecorating, moving furniture and changes in personnel – eg) taking in a lodger or the death of a family member – may all cause a cat to start spraying. The more cats that share a house, the more likely it is that at least one will spray because of internal competition. Doors, curtains, windows, furniture legs and novel objects such as black plastic rubbish bags are all common targets. However because owners provide security, spraying is rarely witnessed. The wet smelly deposits are discovered some time later !

Spraying is a different behaviour from urination which is conducted from a squatting position in the litter tray or outdoors in soil. By contrast, when spraying the cat stands with tail upright and quivering at the tip, often accompanied by a stepping movement with the back legs and the spray is directed backwards.

Spraying behaviour becomes particularly apparent as male cats enter adolescence, when the smell will become very noticeable. The behaviour and the smell are reliably halted by castration at this stage. Entire females often spray to attract males as they come into season, and such behaviour too is reliably halted by sterilisation. In old age too, cats of both sexes may feel less secure even in familiar territory and begin to spray to maintain their presence against real or imagined competition.

The spraying posture can sometimes be adopted as a cat strains to urinate. This is a common response in cats suffering from *F.U.S. (Feline Urological Syndrome)*. If such signs of discomfort are observed when toileting or spraying occurs particularly around the litter tray, the cat should be examined by a Veterinary Surgeon immediately.

Once any medical conditions have been resolved, these suggestions may help cure the indoor sprayer.

TREATMENT :

1. Cats should never be punished for spraying, even if caught in the act as this will further any insecurity and make spraying more likely.
2. If changes have been made to the interior of the house or there have been changes in personnel, the cat should be denied access to most areas unless supervised. Changed rooms should be explored with the owners present until the cat recognises the area as part of his or her territory again.
3. Sprayed areas should be thoroughly cleaned with a warm solution of biological washing powder or liquid (with “enzymes”) followed by a light scrubbing with alcohol, such as surgical spirit, to remove any fatty deposits. Odour removers are also available to use – eg) Nilodour or Febreeze – and sometimes a solution of vinegar and water sponged onto the area can help. Owners should check that such cleaning does not remove dyes from fabric by testing a corner first. The area should be allowed to dry completely and the cat only allowed back to it initially under supervision. Cleaning with ammonia or bleach based products should be avoided, as these can actually smell like urine to pets. Thorough cleaning and odour removing is essential, as cats have a sense of smell much greater than ours, and although we can no longer smell an odour they can !
4. If the cat has access to the outdoors via a cat flap this should be locked shut and the cat let in and out by the owners. Cat flaps destroy the security of the indoors and could allow other rivals in to compete with the occupant, where he or she should feel safest. If spraying stops following this measure, a selective cat flap might be installed later if more

convenient. With these, the cat wears an electronic or magnetic key on a collar, which releases the flap lock and only allows access for the wearer.

5. Confining the cat in an indoor pen or one small room for short periods when unsupervised indoors will provide a more predictable area and help the cat feel more secure. A warm covered bed should be provided. As well as being protected by the bars of the pen, the cat will also be unwilling to spray near its bed as keeping the sleeping area clean and dry is a principle firmly established at only a few weeks of age. If confined for more than 2 to 3 hours a litter tray should be available, sited well away from food and the bed. If the cat stops spraying he or she can be allowed access to the rest of the house one room at a time, with owners remembering to supervise first opportunities in each room. The aim is for the cat to perceive the house as a steadily increasing safe – rest-feeding zone, shared with protective owners.
6. Cats rarely spray near their food so small tubs of dry cat food can be placed at persistently used sites to act as deterrents. Dry food is more hygienic than canned diets for this purpose and will help even if the cat is usually fed canned or fresh meat diet. The dry food should be stuck to the bottom of the container or covered in Glad Wrap to prevent the cat from eating it. Placing uncomfortable walking surfaces such as trays of pinecones or sheets of tin foil may also deter the cat from standing and spraying at some sites.

The speed and success of treatment may be assisted greatly by the use of certain medications. This option should be discussed with the Veterinary Surgeon.

NEWS FLASH !!

There is a product called “Feliway”, this is a spray made up of synthetic cat facial pheromones which is very effective in stopping and preventing cats from urine spraying in your house. Pheromones are a natural substance cats secrete in order to feel secure via rubbing their faces on objects, depositing facial pheromones.

Another medication is “Clomicalm”, which is an anti-anxiety tablet. This has a calming effect and is extremely effective at stopping spaying while ‘re-training’ the unsociable behaviour.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT “FELIWAY” AND “CLOMICALM” PLEASE CONTACT US

Joondalup Central Veterinary Hospital