

Some pets may go to the extreme of urinating or defecating to mark a particular area as their own. Urine-marking is not a house soiling problem. Instead, it is considered territorial behavior. Therefore, to resolve the problem, you need to address the underlying reason for your pet's need to mark their territory in this way. Before this can be done, however, take your pet to the veterinarian to rule out any medical causes for their behavior.

House Soiling or Urine-Marking: How to Tell the Difference

Your Pet May Be Urine-Marking If ...

- The problem is primarily urination. Dogs and cats rarely mark with feces.

- The amount of urine is small and is found primarily on vertical surfaces. (Dogs and cats do sometimes mark on horizontal surfaces.) Leg-lifting and spraying are dominant versions of urine-marking, but even if your pet doesn't assume these postures, they may still be urine-marking.

- Any pet in your home is not spayed or neutered. Intact males and females are both more likely to urine-mark than are spayed or neutered animals. However, even spayed or neutered animals may mark in response to other intact animals in the home.

- Your pet urinates on new objects in the environment (a shopping bag, a visitor's purse), on objects that have unfamiliar smells, or on objects that have another animal's scent.

- Your pet has conflicts with other animals in your home. When there's instability in the pack hierarchy, a dog may feel a need to establish their dominance by urine-marking their territory. If one cat is intimidating another cat, the bullied cat may express their anxiety by urine-marking.

- Your pet has contact with other animals outside your home. A cat who is allowed outdoors may come home and mark after having an encounter with another cat outside. If your pet sees another animal through a door or window, they may feel a need to mark their territory.

- Your dog marks frequently when you walk them.

What You Can Do

- Spay or neuter your pet as soon as possible. Spaying or neutering your pet may stop urine-marking altogether. However, if they have been urine-marking for a long time, a pattern may already be established.

- Resolve conflicts between animals in your home. (For help, see "*Canine Rivalry*" and "*Feline Social Behavior*" and "*Aggression between Family Cats*.")

- Restrict your pet's access to doors and windows through which they can observe animals outside. If this isn't possible, discourage the presence of other animals near your house. (See "*Discouraging Free-Roaming Cats*.")

- Keep your cat indoors. They'll be safer, live longer, and feel less need to mark their territory.

- Clean soiled areas thoroughly. (See "*Successful Cleaning to Remove Pet Odors and Stains*.") Don't use strong-smelling cleaners because they may cause your pet to "over-mark" the spot.

- Make previously soiled areas inaccessible or unattractive. (See "*Aversives for Dogs*" and "*Aversives for Cats*.") If this isn't possible, try to change the significance of those areas to your pet. Feed, treat, and play with your pet in the areas they are inclined to mark.

- Keep objects likely to cause marking out of reach. Items such as guests' belongings and new purchases should be placed in a closet or cabinet.

- If your pet is marking in response to a new resident in your home (such as a roommate or spouse), have the new resident make friends with your pet by feeding, grooming, and playing with them. If you have a new baby, make sure good things happen to your pet when the baby is around. (See "*Preparing Your Pet for Baby's Arrival*.")

- For dogs: Watch your dog when they are indoors for signs that they are thinking about urinating. When they begin to urinate, interrupt them with a loud noise and take them outside. If they urinate outside, praise them and give them a treat. When you're unable to watch them, put your dog in confinement (a crate or small room where they have never marked) or tether them to you with a leash.

- For dogs: Practice "nothing in life is free" with your dog. (See "*Nothing in Life Is Free*.") This is a safe, non-confrontational way to establish your leadership and requires your dog to work for everything they want from you. Have your dog obey at least one command (such as "sit") before you pet them, give them dinner, put on their leash, or throw them a toy. Establishing yourself as a strong leader can help stabilize the hierarchy and thus diminish your dog's need to mark their territory.

- For cats: Try to monitor your cat's movements. If they sniff in an area they have previously marked, interrupt them with a loud noise or squirt them with water. It's best if you can do this without them seeing you. That way, they'll associate the unpleasantness with their intent to mark, rather than with you.

What Not to Do

Don't punish your pet after the fact. Punishment administered even a minute after the event is ineffective because your pet won't understand why they are being punished.

Pets Aren't People

Dogs and cats don't urinate or defecate out of spite or jealousy. If your dog urinates on your baby's diaper bag, it's not because they are jealous of, or dislikes, your baby. The unfamiliar scents and sounds of a new baby in the home are simply causing them to reaffirm their claim on their territory. Likewise, if your cat urinates on your new boyfriend's backpack, it does not reflect their opinion of your taste in men. Instead, they have perceived the presence of an "intruder" and is letting the intruder know that this territory belongs to them.

Dominance or Anxiety?

Urine-marking is usually associated with dominance behavior. Some pets, though, may mark when they feel anxious or upset. For example, a new baby in the home brings new sounds, smells, and people, as well as changes in routine. Your dog or cat probably isn't getting as much attention as they were used to getting. All of these changes cause them to feel anxious, which may cause them to mark.

Likewise, a pet who is generally anxious may become more so by the presence of roaming neighborhood animals in your yard or by the introduction of a new cat or dog into your household. If your pet is feeling anxious, you might consider talking to your veterinarian about medications to reduce their anxiety while you try behavior modification techniques.



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The Auburn Valley Humane Society is dedicated to providing shelter, quality care and love for all the lost, mistreated and abandoned animals in Auburn. AVHS utilizes all available resources to ensure each animal is placed into a loving and forever home and promotes responsible pet ownership through education and outreach.

Adapted from material originally developed by applied animal behaviorists at the Dumb Friends League, Denver, Colorado.
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Reducing Urine-Marking Behavior in Dogs and Cats



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