

Don't Blame the Cat

Owners of house-soiling cats frequently abandon or relinquish them to shelters. But that doesn't have to be the case.

Veterinarians can significantly decrease the number of abandoned cats by preventing house soiling or effectively treating it, according to practice guidelines for veterinary professionals published by the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) and the International Society of Feline Medicine (ISFM). The guidelines – “*AAFP/ISFM Guidelines for Diagnosing and Solving House-Soiling Behavior in Cats*” – have also been endorsed by the American Animal Hospital Association.



“Our hope is that by using these guidelines, veterinary practices will be able to more effectively and confidently address cases of feline house soiling,” AAFP advisory panel co-chair Hazel Carney, DVM, MS, DABVP, was quoted as saying. “Success with these cases will improve the veterinary–client–patient relationships and overall feline welfare, while keeping cats in their homes with a good quality of life.”

The guidelines contain documented information when available and are designed to provide practical insight that

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reflects the clinical experiences of the authors. The document emphasizes that unwanted behavior is not due to spite or anger toward the owner, but rather, because the cat's physical, social, or medical needs are not being met. The guidelines replace the term “inappropriate urination” with the term

“house soiling” because “house soiling” implies no misconduct by the cat and thus, may encourage owners to better follow veterinary recommendations.

The guidelines are intended to help clinicians identify the causes of house soiling, and they include a questionnaire for the cat owner, which can be customized for clinic use. Within the document is an algorithm for the diagnosis and treatment of the four basic categories of house soiling:

- Medical etiologies, including urolithiasis, chronic kidney disease, urinary tract infections, diabetes mellitus, hyperthyroidism, arthritis, orthopedic etiologies and neoplasia.
- Feline idiopathic cystitis (FIC). (Pain or discomfort associated with FIC may cause a cat to exhibit house-soiling behavior.)
- Marking behavior. (A house floor plan diagram that identifies doors and windows, resources, cat-to-cat

interaction locations and areas of marking can be useful in identifying sites where the house-soiling cat feels the need to leave evidence of its presence.)

- Elimination related to primary environmental or social factors. (A house floor plan diagram that identifies litter box locations as well as house-soiling sites in relation to potential areas of cat-to-cat conflict, high traffic or noise can be useful.)

The guidelines propose and explain two universal suggestions for the management of all cases of house soiling: optimizing the litter box/tray, and meeting the “five pillars” of feline environmental needs. They also include specific treatment suggestions for each diagnostic category, take-home instructions for cat owners, and what steps practitioners can take if the frustrated client is considering euthanasia. ■

To access the full set of guidelines, visit: <http://bit.ly/1mc59fP>. For more information on the AAFP visit: www.catvets.com.

Five pillars of a healthy feline environment

Pillar 1: Provide a safe place. A cat’s sense of safety is enhanced by access to isolated or secluded areas where it feels protected from what it perceives to be potential threats. Giving a cat the option of withdrawing increases its sense of control and security.

Pillar 2: Provide multiple and separated key environmental resources: food, water, toileting area, scratching areas, play areas, and resting or sleeping areas. Cats need access to environmental resources without being challenged by other cats. Even in single-cat households, having more than one litter box or food and water bowl in separate locations may be beneficial.

Pillar 3: Provide opportunity for play and predatory behavior. Pseudo-predatory play and feeding behavior satisfies a cat’s instinctive desire to locate, stalk and kill its prey. This

type of activity provides physical and mental stimulation that may help to reduce the risk of obesity, boredom and undesirable behaviors.

Pillar 4: Provide positive, consistent and predictable human-cat social interaction. Consistent, gentle and friendly handling of a kitten from a young age establishes a strong human-cat bond and minimizes a feline pet’s general level of stress and fear of humans. The owner should allow the cat to both initiate and stop interactive behavior.

Pillar 5: Provide an environment that respects the importance of the cat’s sense of smell. It is important for pet owners or other humans to avoid introducing odors or substances (e.g., detergents, medications, foods, laundry, or unfamiliar clothing items) that compete with or disrupt the cat’s sensory perception of its environment.

Source: “AAFP/ISFM Guidelines for Diagnosing and Solving House-Soiling Behavior in Cats.”