



Help! My Cat Keeps Missing the Litter Tray!

By Dr Gretta Howard – Senior Veterinarian

Cats usually have a pretty accurate aim, managing to urinate and defecate within the boundaries of their litter tray....but not always! In fact, I faced this very scenario when my own elderly 18 year old cat (Neechee) started missing her litter tray and urinating just next to it.

The first step is to trouble shoot the problem and rule out a potential medical cause.

There are several reasons why a cat might start urinating next to their tray:

1) **Painful urination**

Cats may start to associate their litter tray with pain due to a urinary tract infection, bladder wall cancer, bladder stones or the presence of a high concentration of crystals in their urine. This is known as litter tray aversion.

2) **Osteoarthritis**

Cats get arthritis too, particularly as they get older, and this can make it increasingly challenging to climb into their litter tray.

3) **Impaired vision**

As part of their veterinary health exam, your cat's eyes should be examined for vision loss. In particular, cats are prone to detached retinas and blindness secondary to hypertension (high blood pressure).

4) **Soiled litter**

If you haven't already noticed, cats are fastidious about cleanliness and will sometimes opt out of doing their business in a dirty litter tray. So, for any household with felines, the rule is generally have at least one litter tray per cat PLUS ONE. Remove faeces daily and replace litter every few days.

5) **Litter tray is too small**

Cats naturally like to dig a hole before toileting so if there isn't enough room or not enough litter inside their tray, this can lead to stress and toileting mistakes.

6) **Litter tray position**

Cats need privacy and quiet so they do not feel vulnerable or under threat while they go to the toilet. Avoid placing litter trays in areas that have a lot of noise or passers-by.

7) **Litter tray design**

Finally, we get to litter tray design. Apart from physical size, sometimes the litter tray needs higher sides in order for the cat to prevent accidents. Cats usually prefer no hood on top and no plastic liner, so ditch those but consider a litter box with high sides.



Case Study: Dr Gretta's own cat - Neechee

The first thing I did for my cat, Neechee, was to collect a sterile urine sample, using a technique called an ultrasound-guided cystocentesis. That way I could assess the appearance of the bladder wall, check for any bladder stones and take a sample using a needle directly from the bladder (cats don't generally appreciate us humans squeezing their bladders to get a sample!). This was examined under the microscope and sent for urine culture to an external laboratory. Results were normal and negative for infection.

The next step was to address Neechee's arthritis – she is 18 years old after all! I know she has chronic kidney disease so I did not want to use anti-inflammatories, so I gave her a Solensia injection, which reduces the pain from arthritis for up to 4 weeks. Neechee was jumping higher than she had jumped in a long time, but she was still missing her litter tray.

I purchased a larger litter tray that was longer and wider than her current one, but the same thing kept happening, so it wasn't just a matter of the size of the tray. I then suspected that it was Neechee's limited vision that was causing some issues with her positioning once inside the box.

Finally, I stumbled upon a large hooded litter tray called the **Catit Jumbo Hooded Litter Box** and for around \$100, my problem was solved! The hood was removed (like humans, cats do not like to sit in a port-a-loo) and the base design was perfect because once my cat was inside the box, the front and sides of the tray were high enough to prevent any urinating outside of it. I still use large absorbent pads underneath and next to the tray just in case, but have gone from changing these daily to not at all! In theory, you could create a similar litter box using a plastic storage container with one of the sides cut out, but DIY is not in my skill set.

So, if your cat starts urinating outside of their litter tray, make sure you book in for a veterinary consultation first to rule out medical issues and then look at the litter tray itself as a potential problem.