

THE LITTER BOX FROM YOUR CAT'S POINT OF VIEW

Lisa A. Pierson, DVM

Urinating and defecating outside of the litter box, also known as "inappropriate elimination," is one of the most common reasons for a cat to be relinquished to a shelter or, in some cases, abused. **Sadly, in many cases it is the fault of the human in charge of the litter box duties.** When someone is asked how often they flush their toilet, the answer is usually, "every time it is used, of course!" We would be disgusted at the thought of anything less and we all know how repulsive 'porta-potties' are and we are not even asked to walk around in that repulsive 'porta-potty' like humans often ask of their cats!

So why do we expect our cats to use dirty litter boxes instead of just going some place else? Humans seem to forget that **a cat's sense of smell is infinitely more sensitive than our own.** Add to this the instinctive nature of the cat to be **clean** and a dirty litter box spells disaster. Think about how a wild cat would handle his bathroom duties. He would not be confined to a 1' x 2' 'bathroom.' **He would not choose to walk around in his own waste.** He would simply choose another plot of land and that "plot of land" could be behind your sofa or in another area of your home.

Please click on the links below to read more about the key issues concerning litter boxes.

[Top reasons for a cat to stop using the litter box](#)

[Do's and Don't's](#)

[Types of litter](#)

[Types of litter boxes, size, number, location](#)

[Kittens/new adult arrivals and litter box usage](#)

[Cleaning the litter box - method to save time and money \(video\)](#)

[Litter mats](#)

[Children and litter boxes](#)

[Inappropriate elimination](#)

Top reasons for a cat to stop using the litter box:

- Dirty litter box(es)
- Poor choice of litter type (using pellets/crystals/non-clumping litter)
- Poor location of litter box(es)
- Blocked from the box by a dominant feline housemate
- Box size is too small
- Too few boxes
- Medical problem(s) This should always be a serious consideration. Many medical issues such as diabetes, cystitis and bladder stones can be avoided by feeding **canned** food not dry food. The increased **water** content and the

FELINE NUTRITION

Feeding Your Cat

[Printable version](#)

Feline Diabetes and Carbohydrates

Feline Obesity

The Carnivore Connection to Nutrition in Cats Debra L. Zoran, DVM, PhD, DACIVM

Commercial Canned Food Choices

Stores in the South Bay area of southern CA (Torrance, Lomita, Redondo Beach, Rancho Palos Verdes, etc.) that carry high quality canned food.

Making Cat Food

Protein/Fat/Carbs Chart

MORE CAT INFO

The Litter Box

Feeding Tubes

Pilling Cats and Dogs- The Dangers of Erosive

decreased **carbohydrate** content of canned food are healthier for your cat than dry. (Please see my [Feeding Your Cat](#) and [Feline Diabetes and Carbohydrates](#) articles on this site.

Do:

- Scoop the litter box twice daily.
- Use clumping litter - except for kittens younger than 8 weeks of age.
- Use **unscented** litter.
- Keep the litter deep enough.
- Use large litter boxes.
- Have enough litter boxes available.
- Have litter boxes placed in a quiet area.
- Use a litter mat that is comfortable for your cat to walk on.
- **Seek veterinary attention if your cat stops using the litter box.**

Do NOT:

- Use litters that do not clump - except for kittens younger than 8 weeks of age.
- Use pelleted (pine or newspaper) or crystal/white pearl litters.
- Use scented litters or any deodorizers.
- Use hooded litter boxes if your intent is to prevent odors from reaching your nose.
- Use plastic 'grass' mats.
- Punish your cat for not using the litter box.
- Put a child in charge of litter box maintenance.

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Scoop litter boxes at least twice daily removing *both* feces and urine.

It is critical to be able to remove both the feces and the urine each time the box is cleaned. Clumping litter is the only type of litter that allows for this to be done completely. Complete removal of the urine is not possible with the non-clumping clay litters, the white pearl litters and any type of pelleted litters such as newspaper or pine. Remember, even a small amount of urine smells strong to a cat! With non-clumping litters, only the feces are removed and possibly a small amount of the urine, thus only 'flushing' half of the cat's toilet.

EXCEPTION TO ABOVE: Kittens (younger than 8 weeks of age) often have temporary bouts of diarrhea for various reasons. They are also more apt to step in their feces and then end up with messy cement boots. Very small kittens may even attempt to eat the litter. For this reason, I advise using a NONclumping litter for small kittens. This is the only time I will use a pelleted litter (I prefer newspaper pellets over the pine pellets) or the non-clumping clay litter. To maintain strict cleanliness, discard the entire amount of litter as necessary (2-3 times daily) and wash the litter box before re-filling. Do NOT just simply remove the feces - the urine MUST be discarded also.

Types of Litter

First of all, there is no perfect litter. I think that I would give my right arm if there was but they all have their drawbacks. Some of the problems associated with the various types of litters are inconveniences for the human and some are strong negatives from the cat's point of view. Given how incredibly common inappropriate elimination (IE) problems are, **I will *always* choose the litter that will be the most inviting to my cats.**

I spend a great deal of my behavioral-consulting time dealing with the nightmare of IE. 'Inappropriate elimination' is a fancy term for a cat that is urinating and/or defecating outside of the litter box. Given the fact that ***most* of these problems are *man-made*** (illogical litters like pellets being use, dirty litter boxes, non-

Esophagitis

TLC Cat Rescue and Adoptions

Drop Trap/Remote Control Trap

Building a Drop Trap

Robbie's Barium Study

Miscellaneous pictures

Recommended Reading - book by Dr. Elizabeth Hodgkins

My Rescued/Adoptable Cats and Kittens

Ant problem solution

clumping litters, etc.), I do whatever I can to provide my cats with the most natural and inviting litter available and that happens to be an UNscented clumping clay litter.

***Note that I said that "most" of these problems are man-made but I want to reiterate - **if your cat suddenly stops using the litter box, please consult with your veterinarian immediately.** There are plenty of medical reasons for a cat to stop using his or her box - some can be life-threatening - so please.....start with a veterinary exam.

Do I get frustrated with the negatives of clumping litter? You bet that I do! I get very tired of stepping on it and seeing the dust on my furniture. I would rather not have a [Swiffer Max](#) in my hands so often. I worry about the dust in my cats' lungs. I keep thinking that there *must* be a better system but, in the end, I always stick with what I have written on this webpage.

I will continue to complain when doing housework but I will keep in mind how much worse it would be if my cats went on strike - urinating and defecating elsewhere - all because I tried to force them to use a litter and litter box system that was not to their liking. I love my cats and a bit of housework is simply the price that I have to pay to give them a very inviting litter box set-up.

Now that I have voiced my very strong opinion that a **clumping** litter is the only sanitary way to maintain a litter box, what are the options in the clumping litter department?

Clumping litter comes in several forms - (example in parentheses):

- 1) clay (Dr. Elsey's Precious Cat Ultra)
- 2) corn (World's Best Cat Litter)
- 3) wheat (SweatScoop)
- 4) pine (Feline Pine - not the pellets but the clumping version)

There may be others but those are the most common ones used.

There are pros and cons to all of them (they all track and they are all dusty but some are worse than others) but my first choice is a basic clumping clay litter.

For the past couple of years, all of the members of our rescue group have been very satisfied with **Dr. Elsey's Precious Cat Ultra** clumping litter. (I have been told by a company representative that the Classic version is pretty much the same as their Ultra product. Also, see [below](#) for information on Dr. Elsey's Cat Attract products for inappropriate elimination problems.)



PAY IT FORWARD: I'm always pleased when visitors to this site write and thank me for the information provided here. It is wonderful to hear about an improved quality of life of a furry friend after ideas learned from these web pages are implemented. If you would like to show your appreciation, please consider a tax-deductible donation to the cat rescue and adoption organization to which I donate my time. Click here for more information.

However, this litter has become unbearably dusty within the last few months. I just (10/8/07) spoke with Gina at Dr. Elsey's and she assured me that the problem (a broken dust collector on one of their processing units) has been taken care of and the dusty product should be off the market as of now or, if not, it should be out of circulation very soon.

12/26/07 update: The last several bags of Dr. Elsey's litter that our rescue group has purchased have been back to this company's baseline dust level so we are, once again, pleased with the product. If you encounter a dusty bag, it may be left over from the 'broken dust collector' problem.

Prior to our discovery of Dr. Elsey's litter, we had good luck with 3 litters made by the Clorox company but a few years ago, their "unscented" litters were anything but unscented! Their EverClean, EverFresh, and ScoopAway litters started carrying a heavy perfume smell despite the word "unscented" printed on the containers. **Added perfume is simply a way for lazy people to not clean the litter box frequently** and I refuse to use any litter with perfume. I have had someone report to me as recently as November, 2007 that these products still contain a perfume smell and so, for this reason, I cannot recommend their use.

Always use **unscented** litters and **do not add any deodorizers** to the litter or around the litter box. Cats, because of their extremely keen sense of smell, are often put off by scented litters and perfumed environments. In addition, they do not need to be grooming perfume chemicals from their coat. **There is absolutely NO need for special perfumes or additives if a cat box is maintained correctly. The best way to keep the box odor free is to clean it!** Odors should be **removed**, not attempts made to cover them up.

Also, I highly recommend not using plastic liners. Liners are very annoying to the cat when they get their claws stuck in them and do not work with the best system to use for clumping litter as outlined [below](#).

Constantly In Search of the Best Cat Litter

Recently, I decided to give **World's Best Cat Litter** (WBCL) Extra Strength another try even though I do worry about the hyperallergenic nature of corn dust. I had tried this corn-based product several years ago and found it to be quite dusty. I had it in a room with dark paneling and it was not too long before I could write my name on the walls. It was no better than the Dr. Elsey's litter in terms of dust and there was also NO improvement with regard to the tracking issue. In fact, I found it to be a bit worse in the tracking department.

But....I decided to give WBCL another try.

I took a bucket of Dr. Elsey's Ultra litter (the current very-dusty product) and a bucket of WBCL out into my yard. I took handfuls of both and let the litter run from my hands about a foot above the bucket. They were about equal in the dust department.

When I compared WBCL to the more current (December, 2007) - less dusty batches of Dr. Elsey's, I found WBCL to be dustier.

Here is where they do differ: I attended a seminar on feline respiratory diseases a couple of years ago. The speaker noted that they see more asthma in cats on corn and wheat-based litters than they do on the more inert clay litters. I did not find this surprising given that corn and wheat are hyperallergens. For this reason, I am very reluctant to use WBCL.

WBCL makes this claim on their webpage which I **strongly disagree** with:

"With **WORLD'S BEST CAT LITTER™** there is no need to worry about a cat or its owner inhaling problematic dust."

I don't see how they can make the claim that breathing in corn (or wheat in the case of SweatScoop) dust is not "problematic".

That said, do I want my cat breathing in ANY dust no matter the source? Of

course not but I have chosen to use a clay-based litter over WBCL or a product like SweatScoop which is wheat-based.

Honestly, though, I really do not have a problem with people using WBCL. I think that it is a very close second to my first choice of an unscented clumping clay litter. However, if a cat has asthma, this is not a litter that I would be using.

One thing that I do like about WBCL is that it is light. As I get older, those 40 pound bags of Dr. Elsey's get heavier and heavier and so I may be switching over to WBCL in the future. However, if I do switch from clumping clay to WBCL, I will do it *gradually* and make sure that my cats are willing to use it since right now, several of my cats are not using the box with WBCL in it. I don't think that they even recognize it as litter. WBCL has a strong corn smell that puts some cats off or confuses them. I have consulted with clients who have switched to WBCL or SweatScoop only to have their cats refuse to use the litter box. Some cats may not view corn or wheat as litter and some cats will even eat it! This latter problem is not surprising since many cats are being fed a terribly species-inappropriate diet of corn- and wheat-laden dry foods. Please see [Feeding Your Cat - Know the Basics of Feline Nutrition](#) for reasons why you are not doing your cat any favors if you are feeding any dry food.

The next litter that I tried recently was the **Feline Pine Scoopable** litter. I did not even put this in a litter box. The minute I opened the bag I decided that this litter would never be used for my cats. The pine smell was terribly strong and it was very dusty. People talk about how wonderful that pine smell is but *my* nose is not what is important here. Considering how sensitive a cat's nose is, I do not recommend this litter.

Several years ago I tried **SweatScoop** and was not satisfied with the clumping ability or the dust levels of this litter. Others have commented on the fact that once it is stuck to the litter pan, it is like trying to remove hardened cement. This is also a litter that I cannot recommend.

In November, 2007, I stumbled onto a litter called [Green Tea Leaves](#). This is supposed to be a clumping litter but it really does not clump well at all. If you had one cat that was not a digger and a mixer in the litter box but, instead, tip-toed in and did their business and left, this litter may end up being reasonable. Right now, I have a box that is half WBCL and half Green Tea Leaves and it is clumping, albeit not in a very sturdy form. The clump would be very easy to break up if a cat dug at it or walked on it.

As of now, I will continue to use Dr. Elsey's Ultra clumping litter as I still feel that it is the most sanitary litter to use.

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[Types of Litter Boxes, Size, Number and Location](#)

Size:

The size of the litter box is very important. It is *very common* for people to pick out a litter box that is too small. The bigger the box, the more inviting it will be to your cat. The more inviting the litter box is to the cat, the more apt he will be to use it. See [below](#) for the litter box (storage container) that I use in my home. I need a very tall (19") box because a couple of my cats stand up to pee. They are what I not-so-affectionately refer to as "elevator butt pee'ers".

If you do not have an elevator butt pee'er like I do, here is a great litter box from www.biddycat.com:



The Bidly Box is longer, wider and deeper than any other litter box on the market. It is shaped just like the cement mixing containers that many people use for litter boxes but this box is deeper. It will still contain the urine of cats that don't fully squat but raise their butts just a bit. On the other hand, a true elevator butt pee'er will urinate over the edge so I cannot use this box for my cats.

Please note that I disagree with the dialog in the movie that you can view on Bidly Cat's website. In fact, this is a great example of how *not* to maintain a litter box as it pertains to litter depth. The movie discusses "scraping the waste off of the bottom of the litter box". **If you allow the litter to get so shallow that the urine and feces stick to the bottom, you will be defeating the purpose of clumping litter which is to remove the waste in total.** The litter should be deep enough so that the waste is suspended in the litter - and not reach the bottom of the box. More on this issue in the [Cleaning the Litter Box](#) section below.

The great thing about the Bidly Box is that you can keep the litter at least 3.5" deep and the cat won't be able to fling the litter out as easily as he can with the box shown below that is only 6.5" deep.

Regarding the issue of size, keep in mind that hooded boxes effectively make the litter box *much smaller* when compared to an unhooded box since the cat's head cannot go beyond the pan perimeter. If using a hooded box, choose the largest and longest one, not necessarily the deepest.

Type:



Hooded Litter Box

Unhooded Litter Box

Update December, 2007:

The hooded box shown above is no longer being made. It was Petmate's old 'Jumbo' - internal dimensions = 20.5"L x 15"W x 19"H. Petmate changed the design of the box and the new version of the Jumbo is not as big as the old one. (Despite the measurements they give on their website, the new pan is not as large as the old pan.)

The bottom line is that nobody makes a decent size hooded litter box!

The decision to use a hooded versus unhooded litter box involves issues from both the human's and the cat's perspective. **I would encourage you to always consider your cat's wishes first and foremost** since if a cat is not pleased with his bathroom accommodations, the human will usually suffer for it in the form of inappropriate elimination behaviors from their cat.

Hooded boxes - cons:

A hooded litter box takes up the same amount of floor space that an unhooded box does but is effectively much smaller for your cat since his head cannot extend beyond the perimeter of the pan.

Some cats become very **claustrophobic** in hooded boxes. Some cats get a sense of feeling **trapped** - especially if there are 'bully' feline housemates waiting to pounce on the cat after he leaves the litter box. Often the scratching in the litter box will entice the other cats in the house to come over to see what the noise is. Then...the poor cat in the box may not feel comfortable exiting the litter box because the other cats are too close. Soon, the more timid cat will start doing his business elsewhere.

Hooded boxes are also just **too small** for most cats - forcing them to contort their body to urinate/defecate and dig/bury without **stepping in their waste**. Often they do not succeed in missing their waste (especially as they get older or have medical problems such as diabetes or kidney disease) and end up stepping in it which results in them tracking urine/feces around your house and upsetting the cat. And remember - if your cat is upset with his litter box experience, he may just decide to go elsewhere.

Hooded litter boxes can also present a problem of **'out of sight; out of mind'** in that some people are less apt to scoop the litter box frequently enough when the box is covered.

Some people have actually commented that they like hooded litter boxes because there is "less odor"! This is very dangerous thinking, not to mention inconsiderate for the cat's comfort. Hooded boxes will **trap odors** which can lead to the cat's refusal to use it. **If you are using a hooded litter box to minimize odor for yourself, you must re-evaluate your thinking and consider your cat's sense of smell.** Stick your head inside the box and take a deep breath. If you are unwilling to do this, why would your cat want to use the box?

Dust is also trapped in hooded boxes instead of being dissipated a bit more as it will be in an unhooded box. This can be very hard on your cat's lungs! Of course, cats do breathe in dust in any type of box since their noses are very close to the litter as they are digging but the problem is accentuated in a hooded box.

I highly suggest that you remove any filter from the top of a hooded litter box for better ventilation of odors and dust. Filters are useless gimmicks that the manufacturers claim "trap odors". Odors should be **removed** - not "trapped".

Hooded boxes - pros:

Hooded boxes offer **privacy** to a timid cat but you will have to watch him carefully to make sure that he is not being stalked by other cats in the household. Otherwise, he may start to feel trapped.

Hooded boxes are neater – **keeping the litter inside** the box and also the **urine** if your cat tends to stand up to urinate. The Petmate design does a good job of keeping the urine inside of the box if your cat hits the lid. Other designs will sometimes allow the urine to leak out and onto the floor which defeats the purpose of a hooded box.

As I outline below in the [Cleaning the Litter Box](#) section, you are defeating the purpose of clumping litter if you keep the litter shallow enough for the urine to reach the bottom. So, to prevent this problem, you need to have your litter at least 3.5" deep and if your cat digs to China, you may need 4" like I keep in my boxes. A hooded box does contain the litter better than an unhooded box.

I have used the hooded box shown above for many years but I am tired of seeing my cats scrunched up in it. It also bothers me that the litter dust is contained in these hooded boxes - adding more insult to their lungs.

However, because of my 'elevator-butt' pee'ers and I need either a hooded box or a high-sided (18" deep) storage container. Otherwise, they will urinate over the edge. I keep my litter 3.5 - 4 inches deep so I need another ~14 inches of height to keep the urine contained in the box.

For years, my cats have been very good about going in these hooded boxes but I really don't think that it is fair for them to have to turn themselves into a 'C' shape just to fit into their litter box - especially as they get older and more arthritic.

I recently put my hooded litter boxes away and am now using storage containers shown here:



These giant litter boxes would not exactly make it into 'Better Homes & Gardens' but I love my cats and, as stated above, I will do anything to make them **love** their litter box. I am deathly afraid of any inappropriate elimination issues and my cats have always been perfect with their litter boxes and I want to keep it that way.

To me, this less-than-aesthetically-pleasing litter box is a very small price to pay for a home that does not smell like cat urine.

The internal dimensions of the above bin are 19.5" wide x 29.5" long x 19" high.
My cats LOVE their new roomy bathroom!

The depth of the litter is 4". The bottom of the door is 8" from the floor. The door is 9" x 9".

~68 pounds of litter ends up giving a 3.5" depth. ~80 pounds of litter gives a 4" depth. Obviously you will not be dumping this litter on a regular basis so you must be careful how you clean the box.

The only negative about these boxes is that I can't use my [cleaning](#) method shown below so I have to be careful as I scoop so as not to break up any urine or fecal balls. I am very fastidious about the cleanliness of the boxes and breaking up the 'waste' balls would not make for a very clean litter box.

I imagine that WBCL would be easier to use in this situation because it is lighter and easier to move around with the scooper but I still want to continue to use a clumping clay litter.

You do not have to use bins this big but this size works for my home and my cats and actually takes up less room than the two hooded boxes that I used to have

side-by-side. Pick the size that works for you keeping in mind that the **bigger the bathroom, the more inviting it will be for your cat.**

If you have a cat that stands up to urinate or have one that really likes to dig to China and fling litter around, I urge you to consider a deep storage container that is **at least 17" wide and 22" long**. The height will be determined by you and your cat - depending on how high his or her rear end goes when they urinate.

I also suggest that you cut a door in whatever container you use rather than ask your cat to jump in and out of it. **Jumping into it is easy for young cats but pushing off of sand that gives way is not going to be a good thing for the joints in their hind legs or their back - no matter the age of the cat.** An older, arthritic cat would probably end up refusing to use the box if forced to jump in and out of it. This is one reason why I really dislike the [Clevercat Top Entry](#) litter box and I strongly urge people to stay away from it. This box is an example of Man inventing a product that is very clearly *not* made with the cat's best interest in mind.

This box has a hole in the top of it and the cat has to jump down into the box. This box is too small and too confining especially for an older cat and, because they have to jump up at an acute angle and push off of a surface that gives way, it is very hard on their joints, tendons and ligaments.

I also wonder what happens when one cat in the household does not bury his waste and now the housemate has to jump down through this hole and try to miss any uncovered urine or feces. Please do not use this litter box. There are much better options for your cat.

Unhooded, smaller/conventional litter boxes:

Many people would rather stick to a conventional, unhooded litter box as long as they do not have cats that stand up to urinate.

Always pick the largest box that your living space can accommodate. Please do not ask your cat to use a small litter box. In the Petmate line, for instance, the "large" is far too small but the "jumbo" size is adequate, shown [above](#).

Another option for a large unhooded box, is a cement mixing container that can be purchased at places like Home Depot. They are inexpensive and easy to clean.

As discussed above, the [Biddy Cat](#) litter box is similar to a cement mixing container but is deeper.

Another choice is [Petmate's Giant Litter Pan](#).

Some people also use storage containers such as [sweater boxes](#).

Number of Boxes and Location:

The number and location of the litter boxes are very important issues. Many cats will not use a litter box if it has been used by another cat. In addition, some cats prefer to urinate in one box and defecate in another. Also, a common cause of inappropriate elimination stems from a more dominant cat blocking the pathway to the litter box. The more passive/timid cat is forced to look elsewhere for a bathroom. In this situation it is critical to have enough boxes in 'safe' areas to minimize the potential for problems. Don't put all of the litter boxes in the same spot if you have a bully cat that may be blocking a timid cat from the box. Place the boxes in quiet, low traffic areas. The laundry room is often *not* a suitable place due to the noise from the washer and dryer and has led to many litter box aversion cases. Also, it is best to not place litter boxes near the cat's eating area.

A very common problem arises when people allow young **kittens** or **frightened adult cats that have recently been adopted** to have access to too large of an environment without enough litter boxes *close by*. Often the scared cat or kitten is hiding in one part of the house while his litter box is in another part of the house.

Keep in mind that these animals are not going to suddenly become brave when

their bladder gets full and venture out to look for a litter box in a strange environment.

Humans often expect far too much from a young or scared kitten or a scared adult cat!!

In the case of a recently adopted kitten or cat, keep his world small (a single room) until you know that he is using the litter box and is comfortable in his room. Depending on the kitten or cat, this may take several days or a couple of weeks. Only when he is comfortable in one room should you open up the door and let him venture out. Do not carry him to another part of the house. Instead, let him pick his own path so that he will know how to get back to his litter box.

Even if a new kitten is brave and sociable, please do not just turn this kitten loose in a large area and expect him to know or remember where his litter box is if he gets to playing at a distance from that box - or if something does scare him and he ends up hiding in a part of the house far from his litter box.

They should not be expect to remember that their bathroom is 'down the hall...second door on the right'. When a kitten has to go...he has to go now and they often will not hold it while they go and search for their litter box. Please remember that human children take a long time to potty train and be thankful that kittens are much easier to train! However, even though kittens are much better than human babies when it comes to being litter box trained, don't push your luck and stress the kitten by allowing him access to a large environment without his litter box very close by and easily accessible. Otherwise, you will end up fostering very bad habits in the kitten if he gets used to urinating and defecating in areas other than his litter box.

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Cleaning the Litter Box

I will repeat the question that I posed above: How often does a human flush their own toilet? Please keep the answer to this question in mind as it pertains to just how clean you should be keeping your cat's litter box.

Cats should not have to dig around in their own waste - or that of their housemates - looking for a clean spot. I am sure that people think I'm nuts for making a [video](#) about cleaning a litter box but this is the method that I have found that works the best for cleaning a litter box with clumping litter. This method results in the waste material being removed in total without being broken up.

Note: I purposely let the litter box get extra dirty (I actually consider it to be unacceptably filthy) for the filming of this great event. In my opinion, a litter box is plenty dirty once there are 3-4 'items' in it. **PLEASE do NOT let your litter box get as dirty as the one shown in this video! If you cannot stick to the '3-4 item' rule because of your work schedule, then please add more boxes.)**

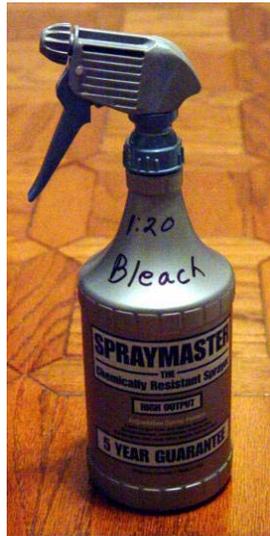
The purpose of clumping litter is to be able to remove the urine balls and feces intact and completely. This means that the litter needs to be **deep** enough so that you can get the scooper **under** the waste material so that the urine balls and feces do not stick to the bottom of the litter box. **You can't remove the waste material intact and in total if you are scraping it off of the bottom of the box** This is a Catch-22. People who discard their litter on a regular basis tend to not keep the litter deep enough and then the box is a mess to clean because litter is gummed up on the bottom. This results in waste residue ending up stuck to the bottom of the box for your cat to dig around in. This is not sanitary and it defeats the purpose of clumping litter.

In my old hooded jumbo litter box like the one shown above, I used between 30-40 pounds of clumping litter to get it to a depth (**3.5" - 4"**) where my cats could not reach the bottom. In the storage containers that I am currently using, I keep 80 pounds of litter in the box.

If using an unhooded box, you need to strike a balance between having too much litter in the box so that you end up with beach-front property surrounding the box,

and not having enough litter so that your cat's urine or feces ends up stuck to the bottom. If your cat is an aggressive digger and is flinging litter over the edge, you will need to get a deeper litter box, such as the [Biddy Cat](#) box.

If the urine balls get stuck to the side of the box, move the litter away, remove the urine ball and then clean the area with a dilute (1:30) bleach solution and a paper towel. (The bottle below says 1:20 which is what I use....but this strength will ruin most sprayers so stick to 1:30.) Rather than using my scooper to scrape off the urine ball, I usually just hit the side of the box and the urine ball dislodges and falls into the scooper. That way, I don't have to clean the scooper when I am done.



Industrial-grade spray bottle for bleach solution

Also, clean any fecal material from the side of the box. I prefer light colored boxes which allow me to see the soiled areas easier. Don't forget to clean the hood if soiled. Dry the area and move the litter back. Keep a roll of paper towels and a dilute bleach solution in a spray bottle next to each litter box. I find that the Spraymaster, an industrial grade spray bottle from Home Depot or Smart & Final, works the best for a bleach solution. The cheaper spray bottles do not hold up well when used for bleach. Also, bleach degrades when exposed to light so an opaque bottle is needed.

Many people choose to discard the litter every week or two and start fresh but their litter box and litter are often very dirty by the time they get around to dumping all of the litter and scrubbing the box. There is a more sanitary alternative to this method as shown in the [video](#).

My feeling is that I want my cats' bathroom to be very clean on a **daily basis**. I do not allow the box or the litter to get to the point that it needs a once-a-week or even once-every-two-weeks scrubbing.

Throwing litter away on a frequent basis is expensive, time-consuming and hard on the back. There really is an easier and cheaper way to maintain a clean litter box - but you must be thorough in your cleaning, and scoop frequently - which your cat will appreciate. For the method shown in the video, you will need a scooper made out of metal or sturdy plastic. Some brands of plastic scoopers are too brittle and often break. The [Van Ness brand](#), shown here is much sturdier.



Sturdy scoop and plastic waste container

Clean the scooper as needed. Allowing a scooper to stay soiled simply drags more bacteria through the litter. If a person is careful about **cleaning the box thoroughly** as shown in the [video](#) and **scooping carefully** so as not to break up the urine balls, it may be acceptable to forego regular discarding of the litter - saving you time, money and a backache. Instead, add to the litter to keep it at the proper depth (3.5 - 4 inches).

However, **if in doubt as to the cleanliness of the litter, it is important to discard it on a regular basis.** If you do choose to discard the litter on a regular basis, it is still advisable to **spot clean** the sides of the box and hood with a dilute bleach solution daily rather than to let any soiling build up for a once-a-week scrubbing. Your cat will appreciate this regular freshening-up of his toilet.

Here is an example of a product that a lazy human may try to use to avoid keeping a litter box **clean**. [Littervent](#) is a venting system to remove foul odors from a litter box but what is wrong with this picture (product)? If there is enough waste material in your cat's litter box to generate a foul odor - enough to necessitate setting up an exhaust system to remove the air from the box - just what are you expecting your cat to walk through?!

Please do not use a product like this in lieu of keeping the litter box clean.

If you have more than one cat, you should always have more than one box so that if one cat defecates or urinates but does not bury it, the other cat will have another litter box to use.

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Litter Mats

Litter mats are often used outside of the opening of a hooded box or storage container to decrease tracking of the litter. Do **not** use the plastic 'grass' mats or the mats with raised bumps on them as they are very uncomfortable for your cat to walk on, often leading to litter box avoidance. Some people use carpet sections or towels but I prefer to use this [litter mat](#) shown below. This mat allows the litter to fall into a lower tray so that you only have to tend to it every couple of weeks and this design also keeps your cat from walking on the litter. Also, the lower tray will catch any urine if your cat accidentally aims out the door.



Here is a picture of another type of mat that is very useful. This particular brand is not made anymore but the Booda Litter Mat is close to it in design. Whatever you choose to use, just make sure that your cat is comfortable when walking on it and is not reluctant to enter the litter box.

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Children

Please do not force your cat to suffer with a dirty litter box because you've designated cleaning it as your child's responsibility. Children often cannot be trusted to maintain a litter box properly and your cat will suffer for it and, in turn, so will you when you are faced with an inappropriate elimination problem.

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If Faced With an Inappropriate Elimination Problem

First of all **DO NOT PUNISH YOUR CAT**. Punishment will NOT help the situation and will often make matters worse. Few things upset me more than when I hear about people actually rubbing their cat's (or dog's) nose in the waste as if this will help the situation!

Seek veterinary attention as soon as possible. There are many medical reasons why cats stop using the litter box – many of which are strongly linked to the dry food that is fed to cats. (Please see [Feeding Your Cat: Know the Basics of](#)

[Feline Nutrition](#)

Diabetes, kidney disease, cystitis (painful inflammation of the bladder), bladder or kidney stones are some of the more common medical problems that can lead to a litter box aversion.

VERY IMPORTANT: If your cat is getting in and out of the litter box and is unable to pass any urine or is looking like he is distressed and wanting to urinate outside the box this is a MEDICAL EMERGENCY! A cat with a blockage of the urinary tract can rupture his bladder within 24 hours resulting in death. You may also notice a blocked cat or one with cystitis licking the genital area frequently.

A cat with cystitis will pass SMALL amounts of urine FREQUENTLY so also make note of the size and number of the urine balls on a daily basis. A **100 percent canned food diet** with its high water and low carbohydrate content must be included in the treatment for any cat with cystitis, diabetes, or bladder stones. In fact, all cats should be on 100 percent canned food or a raw meat diet. Dry food is an illogical food source for a cat and causes many health problems. Dry food, with its species-inappropriate water content, is not a friend of the urinary tract system - especially the bladder.

Once you have ruled out a medical issue, you need to evaluate your cat's litter box system:

- 1) Are you using an UNscented clumping litter?
- 2) Is his box kept *very* clean? Less than 3-4 items at a maximum?
- 3) Is his litter box big enough?
- 4) Is it in a safe location as far as he is concerned?
- 5) Are there any feline housemates that may be tormenting him in the litter box - not allowing him to enter or exit?
- 6) Are there enough boxes? Some cats like to urinate in one and defecate in another one.
- 7) If you are using a hooded box, have you tried taking the hood off?
- 8) Have you tried using **Dr. Elsey's Cat Attract** product? It comes as a [ready-to-use litter](#) or as an [additive](#) that you will need to add to an UNscented clumping clay litter. It must be UNscented clumping clay since this type of litter has absolutely no odor to it. Many people have had great luck with the Cat Attract products. Fair warning.....many cats love this litter so much that they will roll in it at first. I have never heard of a cat that keeps rolling in it or that rolls in it after the box is used. I actually consider it a good sign when they roll in it since it is obviously very 'attractive' to them! This behavior is usually temporary.
- 9) If you are having problems transitioning an outdoor cat to an indoor cat and he is refusing to use the litter box, or if your cat prefers using your potted plants instead of his litter box, try using **potting soil** instead of clumping litter. Once the cat has used the potting soil on a regular basis for a couple of weeks, you can gradually add a small amount of clumping litter to see if you can change him over. You will need to empty the box twice daily when using potting soil and scrub the box each time. Also please understand that by using this non-clumping substrate, the urine will soak into the litter box (plastic is fairly porous and easily impregnated with odors) with only a few urinations so I strongly suggest that you get a new litter box when you switch over to using the clumping litter and start with a fresh, clean box.

Conclusion

It is much easier to **prevent** an inappropriate elimination problem with a proper diet and sound litter box practices than it is to fix one once it starts. Not all of the issues that cause cats to stop using the litter box are within our control but many

factors are as outlined in this essay.

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