

## Chapter Three

### Resolving a Medical Problem in Dogs



While behavioural issues are often associated with inappropriate house soiling, all too often medical causes are actually responsible for the problem. There is no need to panic as this is just a precautionary measure. If something is wrong, then our animals will benefit from treatment. It is no easy feat identifying whether the issue is behavioural or medical, making it a priority to involve your veterinarian at the outset. After a thorough physical exam, the vet will do urinalysis and blood profile tests to determine whether an illness is causing your dog to urinate in the house. If any of these tests identify abnormalities, your vet will suggest further testing prior to initiating a treatment strategy. There are a variety of ailments that could result in this problem, but it is important not to rely on medical treatment alone. With a little collaboration, life will be much easier for our companions and the house soiling problem will be solved.

#### Urinary Incontinence

Extremely common in canines of any age, urinary incontinence is particularly prevalent in spayed females and older dogs. This diagnosis is given to animals suffering a variety of problems that cause them to dribble small amounts of urine uncontrollably, both when awake and while asleep. There is no straining to eliminate and it usually just happens, seemingly without the dog being aware of it.

#### What Causes Urinary Incontinence?

There are a myriad of physical problems that are responsible for this condition in dogs:

- A lack of sphincter control makes it impossible for the animal to hold it in, so it leaks out.
- Physical abnormalities such as vaginal stricture, vaginal urine pooling, ectopic ureters, patent urachus, urethral sphincter incompetence, ureterovaginal fistula, idiopathic detrusor instability, pelvic bladder and ureterocele are common triggers of incontinence.
- Paradoxical or urge incontinence affect the ability to feel when the bladder is full. This causes overflow to trickle out continuously.
- Trauma, growths or tumours that have damaged the nerves or spinal column, effectively preventing the nervous system from supplying information to and from the bladder.

#### How is Urinary Incontinence Diagnosed?

## Chapter Four

### Resolving a Behavioural Problem in Cats

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#### How to Diagnose the Problem...

Cats are picky about their toilet habits. Unlike dogs, they are more secretive and prefer privacy. This is why they like to bury their waste and cover their urine. It is also responsible for many behaviour issues that result in inappropriate elimination around the house and it is the sole reason why food rewards are often unsuccessful tools to use. While this problem is predominantly experienced with indoor cats, those with



outside access are also known culprits of urine marking and house soiling. Discovering the underlying cause of our feline's 'accidents' is of paramount importance if we are to stop it effectively. Identifying whether the problem is behavioural or medical is the first step to correct diagnosis:

1. At the first sign of a house messing problem, your veterinarian must be consulted. It is imperative to rule out medical causes, which are extremely common in cats (especially those that usually eliminate outside). Often this is one of the first signs of illness and your cat will require immediate treatment. The vet will do a thorough physical exam, initiate urinalysis, do a blood profile test and review their medical history. Further laboratory testing will be required if any abnormalities are found. If a medical issue is the cause of the problem, a treatment strategy will need to be integrated with hygienic litter box practices at home.
2. Only after medical problems have been ruled out can we safely declare the issue behavioural. If this is the case, we will need to figure out what is causing our cats to urinate in unwanted places:
  - Does your cat only relieve itself on certain surfaces? Tiles, fabrics, carpets, sand, fine litter, coarse litter or something specific. Many cats are very particular about their toilet area. It may be what they have always used before, a negative association with dirty litter or they quite possibly just do not like anything else.
  - Is your cat avoiding a particular area? Often they will not use their litter box if it is too close to activity, other animals, noisy appliances, confined spaces, walls or even if there is too much light.
  - Is the litter box too small, too big, too high or uncomfortable for the cat to use? Older cats frequently have mobility issues. All cats need enough space to scratch around in; some feel too exposed in large areas, and others do not like fancy boxes with doors.

- **Puppy Pads**

Purchased at almost all pet supply stores, puppy pads are the most expensive option available. In order to keep the smell at a minimum, it is advisable to use two layers at a time. Put a clean one underneath the dirty one each night. It will absorb some of the smell. The next morning, hang the bottom one up to dry and throw the top one away. When thoroughly dry, put it on top of a new clean one. In the beginning, it is recommended that you change the cycle every two days to ensure the smell is strong enough.



- **Grass Patches**

Undoubtedly the best elimination mat to use, grass sods are known for their resemblance to the outside world. It becomes much easier to take a dog outside if it is already used to grass. It should be big enough for the dog to turn around comfortably and should ideally have holes underneath. The urine should be caught by a stable drip tray, which must be rinsed every morning with a hosepipe. Faeces must be picked up and disposed of. The grass must also be watered daily and returned inside when dry. There are some really fancy grass sod products available that are designed to make this method as easy as possible.

- **Old Towels**

While many people use old towels, there is a serious drawback. If you are going to teach your dog to eliminate on towels, you had best make sure that nobody within your household has a tendency to leave towels lying around. It is unpleasant, to say the least, when you climb out of the shower and inadvertently smear yourself with your dog's waste. On the other hand, it is an excellent incentive to make sure everybody hangs their towels up neatly. If you choose to use old towels, then two or three should be used at a time. The top one must be put into the wash daily. The bottom towel must be placed on top of a clean one each day and so the cycle continues. Hang the bottom towels up every morning and allow them to dry completely before using them again.

- **Newspapers**

In the old days, newspapers were the most common technique used for housetraining, in conjunction with taking the dog outside. Cheap, easy to obtain, newspapers do not require washing. They do need to be hung up to dry each day though, as absurd as that sounds. As with towels and puppy pads, it is best to use at least two at a time (preferably more). The top newspaper must be thrown away each morning, with the bottom ones moving consecutively to the top. Make sure that you spread them over a big enough area as dogs are prone to miss the spot.

## Surface Avoidance

This behaviour problem can be a real pain, but it is also among the easiest to solve. Dogs that refuse to eliminate on anything other than what they are used to present us with a unique challenge. They are anxious and uncertain about using something new; we need to be careful about exacerbating these fears and making it worse. Commonly suffered by adult dogs, the issue generally starts during early puppyhood. Puppy mills, kennels, apartments, laboratories, indoor runs and closed off outside areas are usually to blame. It is also common with house dogs that have been taught to urinate exclusively in one area or on one type of surface. These include newspapers, grass sods, puppy pads, tiled floors, wooden floors, concrete, pavements, pebbles, sand, steel floors, indoor plants, outside bushes or anything else. These dogs are highly resistant to urinating anywhere else. Fortunately, with dedication and creative thinking, the problem is easily addressed within a few days.



- **Designated Surface**

This is where you want your dog to do its business, yet the dog refuses to eliminate there. The goal is to gradually and subtly trick your dog into using this surface instead.

- **Preferred Surface**

This is where your dog is currently doing its business. It is the only place where they will go. The goal is to slowly entice them to urinate on something else (your chosen area).

In short, we need the dog to stop being particular about using their preferred surface and happily use your designated surface instead. In order to accomplish this, the dog must never be confined to your designated area without access to their preferred surface. This will result in extreme emotional, mental and physical stress for the dog. In fact, it is likely to trigger a whole range of anxiety related problems instead. It is far easier to achieve our long-term objectives by not making our dogs panic stricken.

### **Solving Surface Avoidance Problems...**

Fixing this problem involves using a combination of housetraining and gradually covering up one surface in order to encourage acceptance of the other. Intertwining the two surfaces together is the fastest and most effective way to eventually swop them completely, while keeping the dog relaxed and comfortable throughout:

- As your cat's condition improves, give them more access to the house and provide them with mental stimulation. Each day, expand their space by another room. Make sure they have toys to play with, obstacles to climb and windows to view the world from.
- Put a litter box in each room so that your cat is able to get to it in a timely manner. A great deal of waste is produced by gastrointestinal sufferers. Remove all faeces as promptly as possible or your cat will not go there, forcing you to clean it off your furniture or floors instead.
- Feed your cat exactly what your veterinarian told you to. Some are prescribed boiled chicken, others a complete change in diet and some may only eat certain wet foods for a couple of days.

## Brain Disorders

Easily the saddest thing to see our pets suffer is a brain disorder. In aging cats it is not uncommon to notice bizarre behaviours similar to those we experience with Alzheimer's patients, but any cat may become a victim. Incessant meowing, circling, pacing, staring vacantly, getting stuck in corners, unable to navigate their way around furniture, forgetting where they are, unable to recognize others, getting lost, becoming completely disorientated, restless sleep cycles and changes in lavatory habits – these are all a result of mental decline in coordination, learned behaviour, thinking and memory.

### What Causes a Brain Disorder?

Little is known about what causes mental degeneration. Studies have shown an accumulation of the substance amyloid within the brain and its blood vessels. This is prevalent in human Alzheimer's sufferers. Other physical clues are cerebral atrophy, a decline in neuron production and altered levels of serotonin and dopamine. All geriatric cats will experience physical regression. Organs start to shut down and the body begins to fail, including the brain. Some cats may be genetically prone to the condition.

- **Oxygen Deprivation**

Commonly a side effect of a slow decline in heart function or high blood pressure caused by hyperthyroidism and renal failure, oxygen deprivation will damage the brain and impair its ability to function properly. This will result in 'senile-like' symptoms.

- **Tumours**

If a growth develops on the brain, the cat will lose a great deal of cognitive ability. As the tumour enlarges, it puts huge pressure on the brain and eventually restricts blood

