

## Dr. Justine A. Lee, DVM, DACVECC

Justine has more than 18 years of experience in the veterinary industry and is a board-certified emergency critical care veterinary specialist and toxicologist as well as the CEO and founder of Vetgirl. She is also a founding member of IDEXX's Pet Health Network team.

Having a [litter box](#) in your house is a dirty job, but as a cat guardian, it's important that you pay careful attention to it. Why? Because lots of [behavioral](#) problems can result from having the wrong type, number or size of litter boxes. In fact, having a dirty litter box can result in medical problems for your [cats](#)!

### The first thing to know about litter boxes

[Make sure you have the right number of litter boxes](#). My general recommendation?  $N+1$  = number of litter boxes for cats ( $N$  = number of cats you have). So if you have 1 cat, you should have 2 boxes. If you have 3 cats, you should have 4 boxes.

Read on for answers about your kitty litter woes.

### My cat is avoiding the litter box

As cats are fastidious [groomers](#) (in other words, they love to be clean!), they hate stepping into a dirty litter box that is full of clumps of [feces](#) and [urine](#). If you slack on scooping, you may notice your cat avoiding the litter box and starting to leave poop "presents" for you on the floor right by the box. This is your big hint to clean the box!

Keep in mind that depending on what type of kitty litter you are using, you should scoop daily. You don't need to dump the whole box into the trash – not only is that very wasteful, but it's filling our landfills with unnecessary environmentally unfriendly bentonite clay. Instead, use an empty, plastic container with a lid, line it with a plastic bag and scoop daily into this waste container. At the end of the week, simply dump out the clumps of waste and you'll make your cat a whole lot happier and healthier!

### My cat is spending more time in the litter box

If your cat is spending more time than usual in the litter box, make sure to take the time to inspect what is

going on. This may be due to [diarrhea](#), which can be a result of medical problems like:

- [Inflammatory bowel disease \(IBD\)](#)
- Intestinal cancer

Alternatively, your cat can be straining secondary to constipation, which may be due to medical problems affecting water balance (e.g., chronic kidney failure, [diabetes mellitus](#)) or specific colon problems (e.g., [megacolon](#)). When in doubt, scoop daily, inspect the problem and contact your [veterinarian](#) for an appropriate medical workup (which may include blood work, [fecal test](#), [x-rays](#), or even an abdominal ultrasound).

### My cat is making noise in the litter box

If you notice weird sounds coming out of the litter box, that's an indicator that you need to check on your cat immediately. Inappropriate crying in the litter box can be a sign of a [feline urethral obstruction](#), which can be life threatening. This is more commonly seen in young, male, overweight cats and can result in acute kidney injury and even bladder damage or rupture if untreated.

### My cat is peeing more in the litter box

If the clumps in the litter box, all of a sudden, start getting bigger and bigger, it's time to get to a veterinarian. My general guideline? If your cat's clumps are larger than your closed fist, it's too big. Signs of excessive urinating may be due to kidney failure, kidney [infections](#) (e.g., pyelonephritis), [hyperthyroidism](#), and diabetes mellitus. With these [diseases](#), the sooner you recognize it, the better for your cat and the less expensive for you! Simple blood tests with your veterinarian (including a complete blood count, biochemistry panel, thyroid level, urine test and urine culture) can reveal the problem within a few hours.

### My cat is visiting the litter box more often

If you notice your cat making multiple trips to the litter box, scoop immediately and see if any urine or feces is coming out. Rarely, crystals, blood clots or debris in the bladder can get stuck in the tip of the urethra, resulting in a life threatening feline urethral obstruction. Clinical signs of a urinary problem include:

- Urinating in unusual places (e.g., in a large potted plant or in the tub)

- [Vomiting](#)
- Straining to urinate
- Crying in the litter box
- [Lethargy](#)
- Excessive grooming of the rear end
- [Not eating](#)

Other rule outs include bladder stones, [feline lower urinary tract disease \(FLUTD\)](#), or a sterile cystitis. When in doubt, get to a veterinarian immediately – even if it means getting up in the middle of the night to get to an [emergency veterinarian](#)!

Remember to scoop your cat's litter box daily. Not only does it minimize the dirt and smell, but it keeps your cat healthier. Talk with your veterinarian about how to keep your cat healthy. A visit to your vet is a must if your cat is showing any of the signs mentioned above.

[Click here to learn more about your cat peeing frequently.](#)

*If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.*