

PET TALES

Better box habits

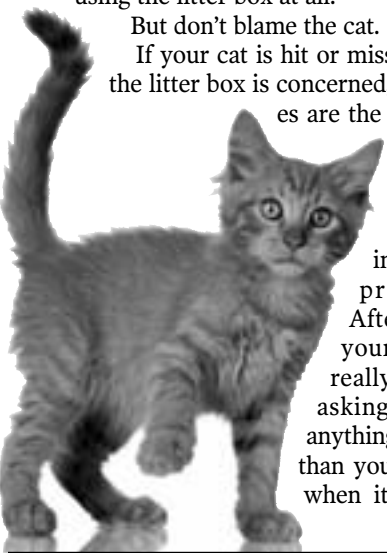
A cat who's missing the litter box may be sending a message — so listen up!

BY DR. MARTY BECKER and GINA SPADAFORI

Correspondent

When the weather turns colder and houses close up for warmth, every little thing starts to annoy us. Like the smell of the litter box, or (worse) the smell of a cat who's not using the litter box at all.

But don't blame the cat. If your cat is hit or miss where the litter box is concerned, chances are the choices



you've made a factor into the problem. After all, your cat really isn't asking for anything more than you would when it comes

to a bathroom. All that's required for most cats is that the bathroom be clean, quiet and offer no surprises. That sounds simple, but the failure to use a litter box is the top behavior complaint of cat lovers, sending countless cats to shelters every year. Before you even consider such a drastic step, you need to try to work things out with your cat if you have a litter box problem.

The first step in solving such a problem is to make sure it's not a medical condition — and that means a trip to your veterinarian for a complete workup. Urinary tract infections and diseases such as diabetes make consistent litter box use impossible for even the most well-intentioned cat. You cannot hope to get your cat using the box again until any health issues have been resolved.

If your cat checks out fine, you need to start working to make sure that everything about the box is to your cat's liking. The second rule of solving a litter box problem: If the cat isn't happy, no one will be happy. Here's what to look for.

- **Cleanliness.** Cats are fastidious animals, and if the litter box is dirty, they look elsewhere for a place to go. Clean the box frequently — twice a day at least — and make sure it's completely scrubbed clean and aired out on a weekly basis. Having an additional litter box may help, too. (Multiple litter boxes are recommended for multicat households, since many cats simply will not share.)

- **Box type and filler.** Many choices people make to suit their own tastes conflict with the cat's sense of what's agreeable. A

covered box may seem more pleasing to you, but your cat may think it's pretty rank inside or scary. Likewise, scented litters may make you think the box smells fine, but your cat may disagree — not only is the box dirty, he reasons, but it also has this extra "clean" odor he can't abide. Start with the basics: a large box with unscented clumping-style litter.

- **Location.** Your cat's box should be away from his food and water, in a place he can get to easily and feel safe in. Consider a location from a cat's point of view: Choose a quiet spot where he can see what's coming at him. A cat doesn't want any surprises while he's in the box.

Make the area where your cat has had mistakes less attractive by cleaning it thoroughly with a pet-odor neutralizer (available from pet-supply retailers). Discourage reuse by covering the area with foil, plastic sheeting or plastic carpet runners with the points up.

If changing things around doesn't clear up the problem in a healthy cat, you may need to retrain him by keeping your pet in a small area such as a guest bathroom for a couple of weeks.

Make sure the area you choose has no good options besides the litter box — no carpet, no pile of dirty laundry. Block off the bathtub or keep an inch of water in it to discourage its use as a place to go. After your cat is reliably using the litter box, let him slowly expand his territory again. As long as you keep up your end of the bargain and keep the litter box clean and safe, you have a good chance the good behavior will become permanent.

If you just can't seem to get the problem resolved, ask your veterinarian for a referral to a veterinary behaviorist. These veterinar-

ians are skilled in behavioral problem-solving and are able to prescribe medications that may make the difference during the retraining period. ■

Pets of the Week



>>Luke
Luke (369745) is a two-month-old medium hair kitten. Luke and his two brothers were brought into the shelter by an owner who could not care for them. He is an affectionate little guy who likes to be groomed.



>>Murphy
(Murphy (371552) is a one-year-old Shih Tzu. He was found wandering on a busy road and was never claimed by his owner. He is a nice boy who is very eager to please.

To adopt a pet

To adopt a pet from Lee County Animal Services, call 432-2083 or visit our shelter located at 5600 Banner Drive, Ft. Myers, within Six-Mile Commercial Park off of Six Mile Cypress Parkway. Adoption hours are 10 am to 4:30 pm Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 10 am to 7 pm Tuesday and 10 am to 2:00 pm Saturday. Adoption fee is \$65 for dogs and \$50 for cats. The adoption fee includes age appropriate vaccinations, spay/neuter surgery, flea treatment, worming, heartworm test for dogs, if six months or older, Feline Aids and Leukemia test for cats, a county license and microchip ID. Pictures of pets available for adoption can be viewed on line at www.leelostpets.com.



HEAVEN



AVAILABLE IN ONE-HOUR SLICES



Massage Envy's professional therapists will help you feel rejuvenated, when it's most convenient for you. A soothing one-hour session is only \$39 for first time guests. And Massage Envy is open weeknights and weekends to accommodate your busy schedule. So whether you want to unwind after work or enjoy a soothing Sunday afternoon, you can always find Heaven, at Massage Envy.

\$39*
Introductory 1-Hour
Massage Session

SCHEDULE YOUR
APPOINTMENT TODAY

Fort Myers
15880 Summerlin Road
In the Publix Center Summerlin at Winkler
MM 19921
(239) 333-ENVY (3689)

Naples
2500 Vanderbilt Beach Road, Suite 1102
In the Publix Center Vanderbilt at Airport
MM 18316
(239) 325-ENVY (3689)

Franchises Available | MassageEnvy.com | Convenient Hours.
Open 7 days: M-F 8am-10pm, Sat 8am-6pm, Sun 10am-6pm

* Valid for first one hour session, which consists of a 50 minute massage and time for consultation and dressing. Not valid for non-member gift certificate purchase. Prices subject to change. Additional local taxes and fees may apply. © 2007 Massage Envy Limited, LLC.

Because of your smile,
you make life more beautiful.



The
Aesthetic
Dental Centre

ROBERT E. HENDRY II
DMD, PA

13650 Metropolis Avenue
Suite 108
Fort Myers, FL 33912

Call 239-768-5600

Creating Beautiful, Healthy Smiles