

MARKING & HOUSETRAINING ADULT DOGS

Urine-marking can occur when the dog is feeling anxious or there is instability in the dog's relationships. This is not a house soiling problem. Also, dogs don't mark because they are angry or jealous like people might expect. To solve this problem, you need to address the underlying reasons for your dog's need to mark.

Your dog may be urine-marking if:

- The problem is primarily urination. Dogs rarely mark with feces.
- The amount of urine is small and found primarily on vertical surfaces. Leg-lifting and spraying are versions of urine-marking, but even if your dog is not making these postures, they may still be marking.
- A pet in your home is not spayed or neutered. Without these procedures, your dog is more likely to urine-mark. However, even spayed or neutered pets may mark in response to pets that aren't fixed.
- Your dog urinates on new objects with unfamiliar smells or have another animal's scent.
- Your dog is having conflicts with other animals in your home.
- Your dog has contact with other animals outside your home or sees animals through the window or door.
- Your dog marks frequently on neighborhood walks.

What You Can Do:

- Spay or neuter your pets as soon as possible. This may stop urine-marking altogether, but if this behavior has been established over a long period of time, it may take more than this.
- Resolve conflicts between animals in your home.
- Restrict your dog's access to doors and windows where they can see animals outside. If this isn't possible, discourage the presence of other animals near your house.
- Clean soiled areas thoroughly. Don't use strong smelling cleaners since your pet may try to "over-mark" the spot.
- Make previously soiled areas inaccessible or unappealing to your dog.
- Keep new objects that cause marking out of reach. New purchases, guests' belongings, etc. should be placed in a closet or cabinet.
- If your dog is marking in response to a new family member in the house, have the new resident make friend with your dog by feeding, grooming, and playing together. Make sure the dog creates a positive association with them.
- Watch your dog at all times when they are indoors for signs of urine-marking. When the dog begins to urinate, interrupt them by making a loud noise and take them outside. Then praise them and give a treat when they urinate outside. When you can't watch your dog, confine them to a crate or small room where they haven't marked.
- Practice "nothing in life is free" with your dog. Have them perform at least one behavior before your pet them, feed them, or throw a toy for them. This, along with clicker training, can help to build your dog's confidence and reduce anxiety.

What Not to Do

Don't punish your dog after the fact. Your dog won't understand why they are being punished and can become scared.

Anxiety

Some dogs will urine-mark when they feel anxious or because of changes in their living situation, like a new baby for example. If you think your dog is feeling anxious, you could talk to your veterinarian about medication to reduce anxiety while you work on changing this marking behavior.



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Adult dogs in shelters were probably housetrained by their previous owners, but while at the shelter, many not have had enough opportunities to go outside so they may have soiled their kennel areas. This can weaken housetraining habits. Your new dog must learn to adjust to you and your routine. You must also try to work with your dog to learn their “bathroom” signal so you know when to let them out.

Therefore, for the first few weeks you should assume that your new dog has not been housetrained and start at the beginning. If your dog was previously housetrained, this process should go quickly. It will also go much smoother if you take steps to prevent accidents and remind your dog where they are supposed to eliminate.

Establish a Routine

Take your dog out at the same times every day. For example, when your dog first wakes up in the morning, when you get home from work, and before going to bed. Praise your dog when they eliminate outside. You can even give them a treat. However, this must be done immediately so your dog knows what they are being praised for. Choose a location not too far from the door for the bathroom spot. Take your dog, on leash, to the bathroom spot immediately. Play and walk with your dog only after they eliminate. If you clean up an accident in the house, leave the soiled rags or paper towels in the bathroom spot so your dog will recognize the smell as a place where they should go. While your dog is eliminating, use a word/phrase like “go potty” that you can eventually use before they go outside to remind them of what they should be doing. Feeding your dog on a set schedule, once or twice a day, can help with regular eliminations.

Supervision and Confinement

Don't give your dog an opportunity to soil in the house. You should watch your dog at all times when they are indoors. You can use a leash or baby gates to keep them near you. Watch for signs that they need to eliminate, such as sniffing around or circling. If you see these signs, take them outside to the bathroom spot. If your dog eliminates, praise them!

When you're unable to watch your dog closely, they should be confined to an area small enough that they won't want to eliminate there. It should be just big enough for them to comfortably stand, lie down, and turn around. This could be a bathroom or laundry room blocked off with a gate. A crate could also be an option. If your dog has spent several hours in confinement, when you let them out, take them directly to the bathroom spot and praise them when they eliminate.



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Accidents

Most dogs, at some point, will have an accident in the house. This should be expected, as it can be a normal part of your dog adjusting to their new home. If you catch your dog in the act of going inside the house, make a noise to interrupt them (be careful not to scare your dog). Immediately take them to the bathroom spot outside. Then praise them as they finish eliminating there. Do not punish your dog for eliminating in the house. Punishment after the fact will only make things worse. Simply clean up the mess.

Other Types of House Soiling Problems

If you have consistently worked with your dog with these housetraining procedures and it doesn't work, there are many other reasons why your dog could be eliminating inside.



- *Medical Problems:* House soiling can be caused by physical problems. See your vet to rule out possibilities of illness.
- *Fearful/ Excitement Urination:* Some dogs, especially young ones, can lose control of their bladders when they feel threatened or get excited. This usually happens during greetings, intense play, or when they are about to be punished. Dogs with phobias can also lose control of their bowels as a result of dealing with something that scares them.
- *Separation Anxiety:* Dogs that get anxious when they are left alone may house soil as a result. See our Separation Anxiety & Dogs handout for more information.
- *Surface Preferences:* When a dog has been trained to eliminate on only one type of surface, such as newspapers, or has not been offered a variety of surfaces, such as being confined to one type of surface, a surface preference may develop. This behavior can be difficult to change but is often managed by ensuring the preference surface is offered both inside and outside.