

HOUSESOILING—DOGS

BASICS

OVERVIEW

- Urinating and/or defecating (having a bowel movement), as a means of eliminating or marking territory, in a location that the owner considers inappropriate

GENETICS

- Some dog breeds appear to be housetrained more easily than other dog breeds

SIGNALMENT/DESCRIPTION of ANIMAL

Species

- Dogs

Breed Predilections

- Potential genetic breed-related likelihood for ease of housetraining and submissive or excitement urination (“submissive urination” occurs when someone enters the room or home and the dog urinates to signal that s/he is insubordinate to the person; this is “normal” dog-greeting behavior and is seen especially in dogs that are shy or do not have self confidence—unfortunately, this “normal” dog behavior is not desirable; “excitement urination” occurs when a dog gets overly excited or enthusiastic and it leaves “dribbles” of urine at your feet)

Mean Age and Range

- Inappropriate elimination due to improper housetraining primarily seen in younger dogs
- Submissive and excitement urination seen primarily in younger dogs
- Urine marking begins to be displayed as the dog begins to reach sexual maturity

Predominant Sex

- Female dogs generally are easier to housetrain than male dogs
- Intact male dogs are more likely to urine-mark than neutered male dogs and intact or spayed female dogs

SIGNS/OBSERVED CHANGES in the ANIMAL

- Urinating and/or defecating in inappropriate areas (according to the owners), usually inside a home
- Abnormal physical examination findings would be related to an underlying medical cause of inappropriate elimination

CAUSES

- Causes of housesoiling can be related to a primary behavioral problem or secondary to or in association with a medical disorder
- May be associated with signs of other behavioral disorders (such as separation anxiety)
- May be associated with lack of time spent on owner’s part to teach housetraining properly
- May be associated with punishment of a dog that submissively urinates, which may make the problem worse
- Determine potential triggers, via a complete behavioral history, including when, where, and how often the elimination occurs and reliability of outdoor elimination
- If no abnormal physical examination findings are identified, the housesoiling is probably due to a behavioral cause

Behavioral Causes

- Lack of or incomplete housetraining
- Marking behavior
- Submissive urination
- Excitement urination
- Separation anxiety syndrome
- Cognitive dysfunction syndrome (condition in which older dog is confused, forgetful, and may lose its housetraining)
- Noise phobia
- Fear-induced
- Excessive thirst due to psychological need to drink water (known as “psychogenic polydipsia”)

Medical Causes

Degenerative Abnormalities

- Hip dysplasia/osteoarthritis/degenerative joint disease
- Kidney failure

Anatomic or Structural Abnormalities

- Ectopic ureters (condition in which one or both ureters [tube from the kidney to the bladder] insert into the bladder in an unusual location, frequently leading to dribbling of urine)

Metabolic Disease

- Incontinence (inability to control urination and/or defecation)
- Diabetes mellitus (“sugar diabetes”)

- Diabetes insipidus (“water diabetes”)
- Liver insufficiency
- Excessive production of steroids by the adrenal glands (known as “hyperadrenocorticism” or “Cushing’s disease”)
- Inadequate production of steroids by the adrenal glands (known as “hypoadrenocorticism” or “Addison’s disease”)
- Seizures

Cancer

- Kidney cancer
- Bladder cancer
- Other cancers causing weakness

Infectious/Inflammatory Diseases

- Urinary tract infection
- Crystals in the urine (known as “crystalluria”) in association with bladder inflammation (known as “cystitis”) or stones in the urinary tract (known as “urolithiasis”)

RISK FACTORS

- Intact male
- Owners poorly informed or motivated to properly houstrain their dog

TREATMENT

HEALTH CARE

- Any appropriate measures to assure continued good health of the dog

ACTIVITY

- Take dog outside often to ensure that s/he has enough access to eliminate outside, or provide acceptable access to the outside, for example via a dog door
- Increase activity level to help in the treatment of separation anxiety, as well as to improve the dog’s health

DIET

- If the dog is eliminating bowel movement inappropriately, feeding meals at specific times (as opposed to free-choice feeding) may help in maintaining the dog on a schedule of defecation
- Feeding a diet of higher caloric density may help decrease the urge to defecate as often

SURGERY

- Neutering an intact male dog decreases urine marking rapidly in 30% of dogs, with a gradual decline in 20% of dogs, and no change in 50% of male dogs; the results are the same regardless of the age of neutering

MEDICATIONS

Medications presented in this section are intended to provide general information about possible treatment. The treatment for a particular condition may evolve as medical advances are made; therefore, the medications should not be considered as all inclusive.

- If the dog is urine marking or inappropriately eliminating owing to anxiety, medications may be helpful, but only in conjunction with behavior modification
- Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) or tricyclic antidepressants/anti-anxiety medications (TCAs) may be helpful; an example of a SSRI is fluoxetine; an example of a TCA is clomipramine
- Full onset of action of these medications can be four-to-six weeks after initiation of treatment, and owners need to understand the amount of time necessary before seeing response
- Side effects of TCAs can include nausea; vomiting; diarrhea; sluggishness (lethargy); irregular heart beats (known as “cardiac arrhythmias”); and enhancement of seizure activity
- Side effects of SSRIs can include nausea; vomiting; diarrhea; and sluggishness (lethargy)
- Drugs are much less effective if anxiety is not part of the problem; will have negligible effect in dogs that are not houstrained or in dogs with submissive urination
- Progestins were used in the past to control urine marking, but are rarely recommended because of potential severe side effects

FOLLOW-UP CARE

PATIENT MONITORING

- Monitor progress with the owner through follow-up visits or telephone calls; the owner should keep a journal of incidents, inciting factors, and treatments instituted to give an objective view of improvement

PREVENTIONS AND AVOIDANCE

- Properly housetrain the dog
- Neuter male dogs and spay female dogs
- Treat any underlying behavioral condition
- Treat any underlying medical condition

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Inappropriate elimination is the most common individual reason for relinquishment of a pet to a shelter
- Recurrence of housesoiling may happen, if owner does not continue medical and behavioral treatment

EXPECTED COURSE AND PROGNOSIS

- Prognosis for any behavioral problem is highly dependent on the owner's ability to fully follow instructions; rarely are dogs with behavioral problems considered "cured," but instead, they are "managed"
- The following estimations of prognosis are based on the owner following your instructions for behavior modification:
 - Prognosis for decreasing submissive and excitement urination is good
 - Prognosis for managing incomplete housetraining is good
 - Prognosis for urine marking in previously intact male: 50% improve (30% quickly, 20% more slowly) with neutering, even without behavior modification
 - Prognosis for managing urine marking in spayed or neutered dogs is good, if the triggers can be identified and managed with avoidance or other forms of behavior modification
- Some animals with underlying medical causes of inappropriate elimination can still eliminate inappropriately after the medical cause has been treated properly

KEY POINTS

- Proper housetraining should be stressed with clients from the very beginning
- Potential long-term management necessary to control the problem
- Treat underlying/contributing medical problems
- Treat other underlying/contributing behavioral problems
- Clean the soiled areas with an enzymatic cleaner, to help eliminate any odor that may attract the dog to eliminate in that location again; if the object soiled is a piece of clothing, wash it in the washing machine
- Inappropriate elimination is the most common individual reason for relinquishment of a pet to a shelter

Incomplete Housetraining

- Keep the dog completely supervised or confined at all times
- Take the dog outside frequently to eliminate
- Reward the dog for eliminating at the appropriate time and place; requires the owner to go outside with the pet
- Thoroughly clean soiled areas

Submissive Urination

- Do not punish the behavior, since this may make problem worse
- Ignore the dog when s/he comes into the house (no verbal or physical interactions or eye contact)
- The dog should go outside to eliminate before being greeted by any person, including family members
- The dog should be greeted in a non-confrontational and quiet manner; do not lean over the dog or institute interactive play at the time of greeting
- Alternative activities at homecoming (such as asking for a toy or requesting a "sit") may help in mild cases
- For excitement urination, much the same recommendations are applicable as for submissive urination, especially concentrating on not getting the dog overexcited

Urine-Marking Behavior

- Determine any possible triggers to the behavior, including anxiety-provoking stimuli
- Address those triggers with desensitization and counterconditioning and/or avoidance of the trigger, as appropriate
- Neutering is effective in many dogs to decrease urine marking
- Make the areas urine marked aversive to the dog by use of "booby traps," such as upside-down plastic carpet runners or mousetraps, or by use of remote punishment at the very beginning of each and every urine-marking episode, if the owner is able to catch the dog in the act of marking
- Prevent access to preferred marking locations
- Alternatively, change the significance of the area to a positive place, by feeding the dog in the area marked