



Canine Urine Marking

- Urine marking is a natural, instinctive behavior in dogs, but it becomes inappropriate when dogs urinate in the house.
- Urine marking is most common with sexually intact male dogs, but intact female dogs and neutered dogs may also mark.
- Underlying medical reasons for inappropriate urination, such as urinary tract infections, should be ruled out before a diagnosis of marking behavior is made.
- In one study, neutering was found to resolve the problem of urine marking in about half of cases. Urine marking issues can be more difficult to resolve in dogs that are not neutered.
- Behavior modification, environmental treatment, and elimination of anxiety triggers can help to eliminate the behavior. To remove urine odor completely, odor eliminators with enzymes or bacteria must be used to clean up urine marks.

What Is Canine Urine Marking?

Canine urine marking is a natural, instinctive behavior in dogs, but it is not appropriate inside the house. Dogs, especially sexually intact male dogs, urinate on objects to leave a message for other dogs (e.g., claiming their territory). Urine marking behavior usually begins when the dog reaches sexual maturity.

What Causes Canine Urine Marking?

An intact male dog is most likely to mark when there is a female dog in heat nearby. Intact female dogs are also prone to mark when they are in heat. New items are frequent targets for urine marks. However, because urine marking is a form of communication, any dog may mark if another dog has urinated anywhere in the house. Unless the scent of the urine is completely removed, the marking behavior is likely to continue. Use odor eliminators with enzymes or bacteria in them to completely remove the odor.

Any anxiety-producing situation can trigger urine marking as well. Workmen in the house, the arrival of a new baby, or visiting relatives can all produce anxiety in a dog. Even the addition of a new TV or a new computer may threaten a dog so that it feels compelled to mark the packing boxes. Rest assured, your dog is not trying to get back at you. It's just doing what comes naturally.

How Is Canine Urine Marking Diagnosed?

Your veterinarian will start by discussing when, where, and how often the behavior occurs. A workup should be conducted to rule out medical disorders that may be causing the problem. If there are no medical causes, your veterinarian will need to determine if incomplete housetraining or other behavioral conditions are playing a role. Even if there is a medical component to the behavior, there will be a learned aspect as well. This learning may need to be modified once the medical condition is resolved.



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Canine Urine Marking *continued*

Many dogs won't urinate where they eat, so you can also try feeding your dog in the location it used to mark.

How Can It Be Treated?

In most cases, overcoming urine marking requires multiple steps:

Neutering. If the dog is sexually intact, neutering is the first step to remove any hormonal influence for the urine marking behavior. Once the surgery is performed, behavior modification can begin to reinforce urine marking in acceptable locations.

Scent elimination. It is important to remove the scent of previous urine marks with a good enzymatic or bacterial cleaner. Camouflaging the odor with another scent is not effective. An enzymatic cleaner can help neutralize the scent to prevent recurrences of the behavior. Many dogs won't urinate where they eat, so you can also try feeding your dog in the location it used to mark.

Positive reinforcement. Never punish a dog for urine marking. Punishment can create more anxiety, which may only exacerbate the problem. Instead, you need to supervise your pet closely. If you see the dog starting to eliminate inside, interrupt him or her by asking for a competing behavior like come or sit. Then bring the pet outside. When the dog urinates outside, reward him or her with praise and treats. Make sure to bring your dog outside frequently, always providing rewards for appropriate urination outdoors.

Confinement. During retraining, it helps to limit your dog's access to frequently marked areas. You may need to confine your dog to a room or small area by shutting doors or by using baby gates or a crate. You can also use a technique called

the "umbilical cord," in which you use your dog's leash to keep your dog close to you while inside so that you can better monitor his or her behavior. As your dog's behavior improves, you can gradually increase his or her freedom in the house. Be careful to frequently exercise your dog to keep him or her from becoming agitated with long periods of confinement.

Minimize anxieties. If you can identify the factors that are causing your dog anxiety, remove them or minimize their importance. With a new baby, for example, you can desensitize your dog by gradually increasing the amount of time your dog is exposed to the new baby. At the same time, you can use tactics known as *counterconditioning techniques*. These include *classical counterconditioning*, such as associating the baby with items your dog wants, like food, petting, and praise, and *operant counterconditioning*, which involves reinforcing calm behaviors such as "sit" and "down" to replace excited behaviors like jumping up and mouthing when near the baby.

You may also consult your veterinarian about an Adaptil (dog appeasing pheromone) diffuser. By mimicking the pheromones produced by a mother dog to give her puppies a sense of calm and well-being, this product can help ease anxieties in dogs.

Medications. If your dog has a high level of anxiety, you can consult your veterinarian for medications. There are many types of appropriate medications to address anxiety in dogs. These drugs may take 4 to 6 weeks to make a difference. However, behavior modification is always the first choice and should continue, even with medications. ■



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