

Canine Urine Marking

- Urine marking is a natural, instinctive behavior in dogs, but it becomes inappropriate when dogs urinate in the house to identify their territory.
- 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.
- Neutering can often resolve the problem.
- Behavior modification, environmental treatment, and elimination of anxiety triggers can help to eliminate the behavior.

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 mark their territory or to leave a message for other dogs. 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 marking when they are in heat. However, any dog may mark if another dog has urinated anywhere in the house. By urinating on the previous site of urination, the dog essentially “remarks” that location as its own territory. Unless the scent of the urine is completely removed, the dog is likely to keep urinating there.

In multi-dog households, dogs, especially of the same sex, may compete for dominance, which can result in urine marking. This same behavior can occur in a confident dog that feels dominant to the owner.

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

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are no medical causes, your veterinarian will need to determine if incomplete housetraining or other behavioral conditions are causing the problem.

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. In many cases, male dogs that are neutered stop urine marking within weeks to months of the procedure. Female dogs that are spayed almost always stop the behavior. However, behavior modification is often needed as well.
- **Scent elimination.** It is important to remove the scent of previous urine marks with a good enzymatic 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.

Behavior and Training

- **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 with a firm “No,” and 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. As your dog’s behavior improves, you can gradually increase his or her freedom in the house. Be careful to frequently exercise your dog outside, so your dog does not become 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, use counterconditioning tactics, such as praising, petting, and rewarding your pet for calm behaviors around the baby, so it has positive associations with the child.

You may also consult your veterinarian about a D.A.P. 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.

- **Establish dominance.** Some dogs need to be gently reminded that you are the boss and that they need to work for rewards. Ask your dog to sit or lay down, then provide a reward such as a treat or a walk and TLC!
- **Medications.** As a last resort, you can consult your veterinarian for medications. In most cases, dogs are given a type of antidepressant. These drugs often take 4 to 6 weeks to make a difference. However, behavior modification is always the first choice and should continue, even with medications.