

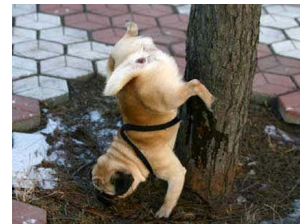
Causes and cures for urine marking

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If you have a dog that lifts his (or her) leg on anything and everything, you know what a frustrating and disgusting habit this can be! While it may be perfectly normal dog behavior, it's not acceptable for dogs to choose to mark inside homes and public places. So it is up to the humans to try to explain that rule to the dog in a way he or she can understand.

Understanding the causes may help you pinpoint the best method for stopping the behavior. If your dog is young, you may notice he has recently started lifting his leg to eliminate. He is trying to be a "big dog" and leave his mark higher than other dogs might. Some small dogs will even walk backwards up a vertical surface in an attempt to mark higher! It's not just the boys. Females may also mark and some get it just as high as the boys! It is often done in response to the sight or smell of another dog. Your dog may be trying to cover the scent left by another dog or be trying to send the message that "hey buddy, this tree is MINE!" or "I've been here". While this may be acceptable outdoors, the problem starts when the dog doesn't realize that leaving those little p-mail messages inside is NOT ok.



Marking is not the same as relieving a full bladder. A dog that marks will often only leave a relatively small amount on a spot he wants to mark, and save the rest for other spots, but will "go" for much longer if simply emptying his bladder. So while a dog may be house trained to not relieve himself indoors, he may not see a problem with marking. Because the dog's motivation for marking is different, it is a different behavior to him than simply potty time.

Marking might also start if there is a change in the environment. This might include a new dog in the house or the near-by houses/yards, a new baby, a new mate for his owner or a change of address. Just as with people, these life changes can be stressful. Some dogs exhibit their stress through marking. When my husband first moved in, my Rottweiler (who had been an only dog till that point) decided he didn't like the change 😊 He lost his spot on the bed, he lost some of my attention and this guy's scent was starting to get all over the house. So at one point, he walked over to my husband's shoes, looked right at him and lifted his leg on the offending footwear! He did come to love my husband and only marked inside that one time, but I think his message was sent loud and clear.

Sometimes what seems like a marking issue could have a medical cause. If the dog has been house trained and suddenly starts urinating in the house, your first thought should be bladder infection or "UTI" Urinary Tract Infection. Anyone who has had one knows that the urge to "go" can be very urgent and overwhelming. So get the dog checked by a vet as soon as possible. While you are waiting for the vet appointment,



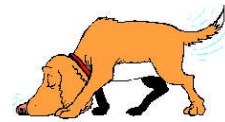
keep the dog confined to easy to clean areas or in a crate and take the dog outside at least once every hour. Do NOT limit the dog's access to water. Drinking water can help flush the urinary system and preventing that can cause the bacteria to build-up making the situation worse. If anything, you want the dog to drink more! Be

sure to let the vet know if there is any sign of blood in the urine (another reason it helps to confine the dog to an easy to clean location!)

So how do you teach your dog that it's not acceptable to mark inside? It helps if you can catch it early, start working on prevention and training at the first sign of indoor marking. If you let it become a habit, it will be much harder to get your message across to the dog. Marking can be its own reward because it feels good and fills a natural urge. So make sure that when you are rewarding alternative behaviors, that you use high value rewards (what your dog wants most).

Using punishment may make the problem HARDER to stop! This is because the dog will learn that marking when you can see him is dangerous, so he will wait till you are not looking or not around. This just adds to the frustration for you and adds difficulty to the training.

The goal is to notice the “set-up” behaviors that precede marking. Watch your dog when he's outside. What does he do just before he lifts his leg? Often there will be sniffing involved and then movement of the body to get on target. This is when the interruption needs to happen. If you can let him know at the “thinking about it stage” that it's not allowed, you'll make it easier to get the message to the dog (and will save yourself some clean-up!) But it means you'll have to watch the dog like a hawk or prevent marking until you can be sure he understands.



Interrupt and redirect sniffing behaviors. There are likely not very many places in your home the dog has not already sniffed. And even if you are visiting someplace new, sniffing is not a critical behavior for the dog to do (though it may be a sign the dog is feeling stressed). So unless you have just dropped a dog cookie, your dog doesn't NEED to be sniffing around. If you see your dog sniffing, call him to you (reward him for leaving the interesting smell and listening when you called!) and get his brain on something else. Or better yet, take the dog outside!

See if he will mark outside instead. If the dog is marking outside- reward that! You want the outside behavior to have a stronger and more frequent history of reward than doing it indoors. If the dog gets “paid” high value rewards to mark outside and nothing if he does it indoors, why would he want to mark indoors for free? How effective this will be as the only training remedy depends on how much of a habit the marking inside has become. You will likely need to do this *in addition to* the other suggestions here.



Try neutering. If your dog is young and has just started the marking behavior, neutering may help stop it. This is especially true if it is driven by his hormones and the need to mark over other males dog's scents or to advertise to females. It can take some time for the hormone levels to come down after the surgery, so keep up preventive measures for awhile.

Clean-up messes correctly and completely! A dog's nose is very powerful and can detect amazing small amounts of odor causing bacteria and oils and whatever else causes the scent in urine. Completely wetting the area with a cleaner that has an enzyme in it will do the best job of removing the odors. Because enzymes are living organisms,

choose and store your products carefully. You don't want to let them freeze or get too hot or sit around in storage too long, which could kill the enzymes and make the product much less effective. Never use an ammonia-based cleaning product. Ammonia is found in urine, so it will make the dog more likely to try to cover that scent.

Prevention Techniques:

Regardless of the training methods above that you choose, you'll want to also employ prevention to make sure the dog is not marking when you aren't looking.

Belly Bands are a popular method. If you search the internet for "belly band" you'll find several sources and many colorful styles. You can also make your own out of an ace type bandage and a feminine pad. The band wraps around the dog, covering his boy parts, so that if he tries to mark, he can't leave any liquid behind. This means that he doesn't get the satisfaction of smelling his own scent over the other dogs. It also leaves him feeling wet and putting the odor on himself. Some dogs are really bothered by that and others could care less. You'll want to use training in addition to the band, otherwise the dog may need to wear the band the rest of his life, and changing the pad and washing the band is nearly as time consuming as cleaning up messes. It is a temporary tool, not a permanent fix.



Crates, gates, doors and leashes. If the dog has specific spots he prefers to mark, you may be able to prevent it by restricting his access to that spot. If you want to keep an eye on the dog, but not use a crate, you can keep the dog on a leash and attach it to you. Whether or not this is a practical solution depends on your situation and dog.

Meds may be needed. If your dog is marking due to stress that you can't remove (the new baby, new spouse, etc.) then you may want to consult with a veterinary behaviorist to see if there are medications that can help your dog cope with the stress.

As with any change of behavior, teaching your dog not to mark in the house may take some time to teach. The longer he has been doing it, the longer it may take to change. It may require the detection of and removal of an underlying cause (previous urine spots, hormones, medical cause, etc.). Be patient and use as many of the suggestions above as you can.