



Urine Marking by Dogs

It is very frustrating for dog owners when their dog urinates inside the house, especially after he was believed to be house trained. In many cases this urination is not just the “need to go”, or a failure of house training, but is a way of marking his territory. Dogs mark to say, “This is mine, and I will protect it.” It is mostly male dogs that mark, with a lift of one of the back legs against a fence or a sofa. Some female dogs mark, too, although it is less common. Outdoors you may see your male dog urinate over the spot where your female dog just urinated.

Male dogs are the most common culprits, but some female dogs that have higher than normal levels of testosterone, either naturally or through testosterone supplements, may also mark. For example, when female Greyhounds were injected with testosterone to improve their racing scores they were more likely to urine mark, although they normally did it in the same squatting position they use to urinate. There is at least one female Welsh terrier who marks by lifting both of her back legs and standing on her front feet.

Why do dogs mark?

Marking is a natural and normal behavior for dogs, so it can be challenging to get the point across to some dogs that it’s frowned upon in human society. Punishing a dog for marking is likely to confuse them, and may result in them finding out of the way places to mark and relieve themselves. This is fine if the place is outdoors, but sometimes it’s in another part of the house. Dogs mark to stake their claim on some piece of property, whether it’s indoors or out, alive (another pet or you!), or inanimate (the food dish or the dining room chairs).

Marking typically happens when there is a change in the living situation. The birth or adoption of a child, a marriage or divorce, moving, a new dog next door, or even for some dogs, simply rearranging the furniture may be followed by marking. Even simple every day changes may elicit marking in some dogs. A child’s back pack or toy left in the living room, a basket of dirty laundry set down so you can answer the phone, or the garbage being moved from the kitchen to the back door may be anointed.

In addition, testosterone seems to play a significant part in urine marking. Dogs that are neutered tend to urine mark less often than they did before neutering.

Small dogs tend to mark indoors more than large dogs. The reason seems to be that they don’t consider the whole house to be part of their living area. Most male dogs that mark do so outdoors, but many small dogs mark in the formal living or dining room or a guest room, or any part of the house that isn’t frequently in use by the family. Some large dogs may do this, too, but it is more commonly seen in small dogs.

What can be done to stop it?

- For the best chances of success in eliminating urine marking, neuter your pet before he reaches 6 months of age.
 - If your dog is already marking, and is an adult that was recently neutered, he may continue to mark for 3 or 4 months. Use the management techniques here to deal with the problem.
 - Some dogs have a long history of urine marking that they may never stop entirely, and management will need to be continued.
- If urine marking began suddenly or recently and there was no change in the dog’s living situation, a visit to the vet to rule out urinary tract problems is in order.
- Manage the dog’s freedom inside the house. For example, if he frequently marks items in the living room, keep him out of that room using baby gates or a crate except when you can keep a close eye on him. Some dogs, especially small ones, will never be able to handle the freedom to roam the entire house.
- If he still manages to lift a leg, tether him to your belt with a leash. Any time you see him start to lift his leg, quickly, but without getting angry, walk him outside and encourage him to mark to his heart’s content out there.



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- Purchase a “Belly band”. These are available under various names and are available at many pet food stores. They are a kind of diaper that wraps around a male dog’s waist and attached with Velcro. Female versions are sold for dogs in heat. It is lined with an absorbent pad that can be changed. Put one on your dog any time the household will be busy, a change will be happening, or there is any sort of change. Over time you may realize that there is a certain time of day your dog needs a belly band, or certain occasions that indicate it is a good idea. Be sure to take the belly band off every time he goes outside so that he can relieve himself freely.
- If your dog marks rooms that you don’t spend much time in, make it a point to hang out in those rooms with your dog so that he learns that this is part of the house, too. Feed him or do training with treats in that room to help him feel that it is inside his den.
- If there is a particular place that the dog repeatedly marks, consider moving his bed and food to that area. If he marks his bed and food, remove them, but sometimes this solves the problem.

What if I catch him in the act?

Punishing your pooch for peeing inappropriately may make the problem worse. Some dogs will begin to do their marking in hidden parts of the house where they are less likely to get caught. Dogs don’t understand why you don’t want them to do something that is completely natural for them. Some dogs may begin to mark more rather than less often if they are punished.

- If you catch your dog lifting his leg to mark, quickly call him outside and give him time out there to mark for a while.
- If he does not come when you call him to go outside, keep a leash on him that drags so that you can gently lead him outside when needed.
- Keep your own demeanor neutral, not happy, not angry.
- Using a crate for time out can be slightly helpful, but only if the time in the crate is kept very short. Research has shown that the longer a time out is, the less effect it has on future behavior. If your dog relieves himself or marks inside his crate, time out in the crate is not going to be a useful training tool for him.

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