

# Dog: Marking



## What Is Urine Marking

Marking is when a dog lifts his leg and sprays a small amount of urine onto a vertical surface. It's a form of canine communication—not something dogs do because they need to empty their bladders. As unpleasant as marking inside the house is, it doesn't mean an otherwise housebroken dog has forgotten his potty training.

Marking is most often seen in sexually mature intact male dogs, but both neutered males and intact and spayed females can sometimes mark.

## Why Dogs Mark

Some reasons dogs mark:

- Sexual status
- Territoriality
- Anxiety
- Calling attention to newness

## What You Can Do

**Spay or neuter.** This is priority number one if your dog marks and isn't already spayed or neutered. In the vast majority (figures in studies vary from 85 to 97%) of intact males, neutering drastically reduces marking. While not a guaranteed cure, it's the first thing you should try.

**Watch out for novelty.** Do you have new furniture arriving? Contractors working on your house? A friend staying for a few days? A new dog next door? These and other new things can trigger territoriality or anxiety in your dog and cause him to mark. A female dog visiting the house can easily trigger marking as a way to signal sexual status. Keep an eye on your dog in such situations:

- Make things or areas your dog has marked before inaccessible. Use a baby gate or another barrier and place objects out of reach.
- Give new people in the house treats to give to your dog and let him approach at his own pace.
- At times when you can't supervise, confine your dog to a safe area until the new person has left or the novelty factor of an object passes.

**Behavior modification.** Is your dog a hard-core marker with a long history of this behavior? Consult a behaviorist to help you create a program to change your dog's marking habit.

**Clean thoroughly.** Clean previously marked things or areas with an enzymatic cleaner to get rid of any trace of urine smell that might entice your dog again. Machine wash fabrics with a mixture of regular detergent and baking soda.

## Tips

- If you see pre-marking behavior, such as sniffing or your dog getting into a sideways angle to a vertical surface, immediately interrupt your dog and direct his attention to other things (toys, a treat, a belly rub).
- Never physically punish your dog for marking. That type of punishment can cause serious behavior problems, including anxiety and aggression.