

Nobody's Perfect

I have heard rabbits described as having “perfect” litter-box habits. I have yet to have — or even meet — such a creature. At least I have never met one who meets my definition of perfect: Never (or even rarely) a poop outside the litter-box.

If your rabbit **always** uses his litter-box for urine and 90% of the time for poops, he has what I would call excellent litter-box habits. If you watch your rabbit hop in and out of the litter-box, it is likely that some of those poops that land outside the box started out inside and were simply kicked out. It is also normal for rabbits to leave a few poops around their cage or beside their litter-box to identify that area as his. Unfortunately, as he begins to take over your house, you may find stray poops in other rooms of your house. This simply means your rabbit feels “at home” in those rooms as well. Luckily, rabbit poops are easy to sweep up with a dustpan and broom.



If your rabbit **used** to be perfect about using the litter-box for urine and suddenly urinates outside the box or seems to dribble urine, he may have a urinary tract infection (UTI), bladder sludge or stones, or kidney disease. Make an appointment with your veterinarian immediately and expect her to suggest a urinalysis (to check for both infection and early kidney disease), blood work (to confirm infection, rule out kidney disease, and check calcium levels), and perhaps an x-ray (to check for sludge and stones). Urinary tract infections can be difficult to cure, so don't be surprised if your veterinarian suggests several weeks of antibiotic therapy.

If there is no medical explanation for loss of litter-box habits, try to identify any changes in your household that coincide with the time your rabbit's habits changed. Changes in your family make-up (new pet, new child, new significant other) or changes in your schedule that give you less time with him may make your rabbit insecure about his place in your family. He may either be “acting up” to gain attention or trying to more firmly establish **his** territory.

If the household change is **not** another rabbit, you may be able to reassure your rabbit of his rightful place in your family by spending more time with him. If you have added another rabbit to your household, you should expect to see some marking of territory, especially if the new rabbit is not yet altered. If you have acquired a new companion for your rabbit and are housing them side-by-side, try moving the litter-box next to the new

rabbit's cage (or add a second litter-box there). In time, the territorial issues should resolve and your rabbit will probably be happy to have a companion of his own species.

If loss of litter-box habits is a behavioral problem, you may have to temporarily reduce your rabbit's freedom while he re-learns to use the box. If you think the problem stems from a new rabbit in your household, try placing a small amount of wet litter from the other rabbit's litter-box in his box. Your rabbit will probably urinate in the box simply to "mark" it as his. If there is no other rabbit in the house, clean up your rabbit's "accidents" with a paper towel and place it in the litter-box. This will help remind him that the box is where he is supposed to urinate.

As you gradually increase your rabbit's freedom again, watch his behavior carefully — you will learn to recognize his position when he is preparing to urinate. When you see this happen, quickly pick him up and place him in the litter-box. Once he urinates there, offer a reward (a small piece of his favorite treat) so he begins to associate using the litter-box with good things.

