

Dear Dr. Fox: In need of a house cat, we got one from the cages at a PetSmart: an unusually light-colored female tabby cat. We discovered that the cat was obese, and was being fed Diamond dry diet cat food; she also had sensitive skin and suffered respiratory irritation. Periodically, she would stop eating and be afflicted by vomiting and diarrhea. Though spayed, she also had discharge from her vulva, which she seemed unable to keep clean. Our vet couldn't really identify the problem, despite blood tests and the administration of antibiotics. The vet did prescribe prescription food for sensitive skin. Eventually, we began to suspect diet when the prescription cat food produced a significant improvement. We gave her supplements, too: Fortiflora and Tomlyn Immune Support. When the cat started to refuse the prescription food, we transitioned to Fancy Feast. On reading your recent advice to another cat owner, we exchanged Fancy Feast for the Wellness brand of minced turkey, which we offer in several small portions, morning and evening. At other times, the cat is free to eat from a bowl of Meow Mix dry food that she seems to like; she wouldn't touch the Wellness grain-free dry food. After two years, we have a different cat. She appears a lot darker now that she's thinner, since we don't see her undercoat. She is trim, alert, active, bright-eyed and has a shiny, healthy-looking coat. There is no sign of skin or respiratory irritation, and no more unpleasant discharge. Though not a lap cat, she is more amenable to petting now, and will come to sit close and rest her head on my thigh when I am sitting on the couch. It was an expensive rescue that the cat desperately needed. All her troubles seem due to poor diet and long captivity in a small cage. And though Wellness is more expensive than Fancy Feast, she is eating much less, between three and six ounces daily.

â€” A.S., Tulsa, Oklahoma

Dear A.S.: I hope all readers who have cats will take note of your important letter: a testimony of how dry kibble makes cats very ill with multiple health problems. Also, the veterinarian who

first attended to your rescued cat should have suggested a wholesome diet and supplements

to combat her various woes. Dear Readers: The lives of many animals, wild and

domestic, have been lost in the apocalyptic fires in California that residents are calling

the “new norm.” Other ecological disasters, such as hurricanes, typhoons, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and

prolonged droughts, are also becoming the new norm in many parts of the world.

The adverse consequences to biodiversity, communities and their economies are going to escalate as

such climatic phenomena increase in frequency and intensity. Disaster preparedness initiatives would be well-advised

in many states and countries. These efforts should include the funding and staffing of

facilities to care for affected animals, and to handle the subsequent environmental cleanup with

a focus on ecological and agricultural restoration. Veterinary colleges and national and regional veterinary

associations all contribute significantly to these efforts, along with animal rescue and protection organizations.

These groups are always in need of public funding, and donations to certified nonprofits

are tax-deductible. The California Veterinary Medical Association Disaster Program (cvma.net) has centered its efforts

on developing the California Veterinary Medical Reserve Corps, a group of veterinarians, registered veterinary

technicians and office staff who volunteer to provide emergency vet care and expertise in

all phases of disaster preparedness and response. According to UC Davis, the medical attention

the animals receive is being funded by donations provided to the school’s Veterinary Catastrophic

Need Fund. The American Veterinary Medical Foundation, which is the charitable arm of the

American Veterinary Medical Association, announced a donation of \$20,000 to help animals affected by

the California wildfires and the veterinarians treating them. The group’s National Veterinary Response Teams

provide expert veterinary care to service animals, including security animals, during disasters and certain

national security events. Organizations such as World Vets are involved in disaster-relief services abroad.

There are also everyday, non-disaster needs in many communities. One standout shelter and animal

foster-care organization in urgent need of funding is Chicago’s Touched by an Animal (touchedbyananimal.org).

Its unique mission serves to aid companion animals whose owners need assistance in the

form of food and litter donations, vet care expenses, boarding and foster care. Many

of the people they help – the elderly, the hospitalized, the homeless, or those who are in transition (both financially and geographically) – fall within the underserved, and sadly, often forgotten and dismissed, population. New California laws: good news for animals: California passed two new laws last month that will help protect animals. First, California became the first state in the United States to ban fur. A bill recently signed by Gov. Gavin Newsom will make it illegal to sell, donate or manufacture fur products in California. The law applies to all clothing, handbags, shoes and other items. The second law is the Circus Cruelty Prevention Act, which bans exotic animals in circuses statewide. California is the third state in the nation with such a ban, joining Hawaii and New Jersey. The law applies to exotic animals, including elephants, monkeys, lions, bears and tigers. The bill does not include dogs or cats, and does not apply to rodeos. Send all mail to animaldocfox@gmail.com or to Dr. Michael Fox in care of Andrews McMeel Syndication, 1130 Walnut St., Kansas City, MO 64106. The volume of mail received prohibits personal replies, but questions and comments of general interest will be discussed in future columns. Visit Dr. Fox's website at DrFoxOneHealth.com.