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## The Best Pet Food Is Not On the Shelves. It's Made at Home.

Dear Dr. Fox:

I have been feeding my 4-year-old Maltese-poodle mixes, Sonny and Cher (14 and 8 pounds, respectively), your fresh-food recipe for 1½ years. Their physical condition has improved dramatically, and we will never go back to commercial food. The benefits are truly worth the little extra trouble to make the food once a week.

Not only do my dogs enjoy their new food, they also can't wait to eat. The dark discharge from their eyes has reduced, and their fur has better texture. They don't have odors anymore and are easier to groom.

I have also discontinued giving them the once-a-month flea medicine, and neither I nor the dog groomer has seen evidence of flea or tick infestation. I don't know whether this is because of the ingredients in the food or the dogs' better overall health.

Until recently, we supplemented their diet with a small amount of dry food in the middle of the day because we were concerned about keeping their teeth clean. We switched to giving them beef marrowbones, after boiling them and removing the messy marrow, for an hour or so. The dogs love them. Thanks for all the advice.

K. & B.J.  
Alexandria

Thanks for confirming the health benefits of good nutrition that people often observe in their dogs and cats when they are taken off manufactured pet foods. Hence my advocacy of home-prepared cat-and-dog foods that consist primarily of whole-food ingredients, ideally certified organic.

Raw beef marrowbones (scalded to kill surface bacteria) are the only bones dogs should be given to clean their teeth. Do not cook the bones for long, or they will become dangerously brittle. A few dogs are obsessive bone gnawers and can damage their teeth, so I advise a five- to 10-minute bone chew daily or a safe rubber chew

toy (such as a Kong product) that, when stuffed with peanut butter, can relieve dogs' boredom and separation anxiety.

Dear Dr. Fox:

Five years ago, I adopted a 6-month-old kitten from a shelter. He was very sweet when he was "in jail," but as soon as he was neutered and I brought him home, I knew there was an issue.

His meanness was his way of handling stress. A little more than a year ago, he went into a rage; he had reached his stress limit. This was all new to me. So I did some research and decided to try Feliway.

I use the dispenser and keep it plugged in all day. This has worked wonders for him and us. I was going to have him put down, but Feliway saved his life. He is still a bit cranky, but he's definitely manageable.

We also have a female cat, and Feliway has no influence on her, but the male calms down within minutes of plugging the dispenser in. Maybe this will help other cat owners with similar issues.

T.C.  
Clovis, Calif.

I am glad that the pheromone Feliway helped your cat feel more secure and turned him from an attack cat to a lap cat.

French veterinary researchers recognized the profound behavioral and psychological effects of certain body odors called pheromones, and they developed this product.

I would appreciate hearing from other readers about their experiences using Feliway on cats with behavioral problems.

There is an equivalent pheromone product available for use in dogs suffering from such conditions as separation anxiety, the pheromone being like the scent around a mother dog's teats.

Dear Dr. Fox:

I love your column and advice

(which is usually great). However, as a feral-cat caretaker and advocate for more than 10 years, I felt compelled to write to educate you and your readers.

Your recent advice in response to a query involving a free-roaming feral cat (call animal control to trap and get the cat into a more responsible home) is, unfortunately, not realistic.

Millions of healthy, adoptable cats are killed in our shelters each year because of overpopulation. Feral cats are killed almost immediately, usually in the trap in which they arrive. The only humane solution is TNR (trap, neuter, return). Once the cat is fixed, rabies-vaccinated and ear-tipped for identification purposes, the nuisance behavior stops. A feeding station should be set up in an out-of-sight location.

Dr. Fox, you could educate so many people. It is my mission to make it a more humane world for these forgotten felines. For information, please go to [www.alleycattalies.org](http://www.alleycattalies.org).

T.B.  
Naples, Fla.

I respect your concern and passion. Doing good feels good, as I know too well as an animal rights advocate. But what feels good might not always be the best thing to do.

The TNR that you and many other cat lovers advocate is controversial. It is no panacea for the plight of homeless, lost and feral (wild) cats. It can be extremely detrimental to indigenous wildlife.

I would endorse TNR, coupled with regular monitoring and daily supplemental feeding, only for feral-cat populations living where humans have created a rodent overpopulation and related public-health problems, as in warehouse districts. A healthy, well-managed, "working" group of TNR cats is appropriate biological warfare in my mind, like using guard dogs to protect sheep from coyotes. But I am wholly opposed

to TNR projects that return cats to the wild.

Dear Dr. Fox:

I just finished reading a letter in your column from J.K. in Norfolk about the dog experiencing grand-mal seizures.

This happened to my beautiful 8-year-old golden retriever, Blu. He continued to have monthly seizures, even while on increasing doses of phenobarbital. Then my vet tested him for hypothyroidism, which seems to be the culprit. Blu is now also on Thyro-Tabs.

I hope I'm not jumping the gun, but it has been 54 days since Blu had a seizure, and we are hopeful that this trend will continue. He has periodic blood work to check certain levels, and I hope we will be able to wean Blu off the phenobarbital.

I'm not certain what the eventual outcome will be, but, for now, I'm just grateful that he doesn't have to experience those seizures and the two-hour aftermath.

J.S.B.  
Troy, N.Y.

Hats off to your veterinarian for testing your dog for hypothyroidism. It must have been quite advanced for it to cause seizures.

Readers should take note of this, because thyroid deficiency is the most prevalent canine endocrine disease, with diabetes, Cushing's (adrenal) disease and pancreatitis close behind.

When middle-aged cats become more irritable and aggressive, check for overactive-thyroid disease. One cause of this disease is thought to be the bromide-based fire-retardant chemical dust in *See ANIMAL DOCTOR, Page 20*

houses from treated carpets and upholstery.

Dear Dr. Fox:

Our recently rescued cat, Mickey (estimated to be more than 10 years old), urinates and sprays outside the litter box. He is very vocal and cries a good deal (independent, we think, of accidents). We do not know whether he cries out in pain and frustration or because he wants attention. He does not appear to be in pain, but he does not like to be picked up or held, so we might be wrong about that.

Mickey's urination behavior is frustrating, and it wears us down. Cleanup can take an hour, and we are worried about the permanent smell, the material damage and the emotional distress to our very clean older cat. Because the behavior is confined to the litter-box area, we assume it could be related to straining or marking, but we don't know. Do you have any advice?

W.L.H.  
St. Paul, Minn.

Your poor cat seems to have more of a physical than emotional problem.

Cats often behave like Mickey when they have painful, impacted anal glands or spinal arthritis. Have these possible causes checked out; the latter can be alleviated with the daily massage therapy mentioned in my book "The Healing Touch for Cats." Arthritis affecting the vertebrae is quite common in older cats, for whom a daily massage and up to one teaspoon of fish oil daily can provide considerable relief. But never give human anti-inflammatory and arthritis drugs such as Tylenol and Aleve to cats or dogs, because fatal liver failure could occur, even with small doses.

Try a different brand of litter (dusty, clay-based litters can cause problems), a larger or extra litter box and plastic sheeting on the floor. Litter boxes with covers can become so ammoniated if not cleaned out daily that cats might refuse to use them.

Chronic pain with muscle spasms and associated anxiety can be alleviated with Valium or valerian, which can be prescribed by a veterinarian.

Stem cells, which have multipotential healing/tissue-repairing properties, don't have to come from human fetuses and umbilical cords. If you have a severely arthritic dog, ask your vet to contact Vet-Stem, [www.vet-stem.com](http://www.vet-stem.com), and learn about harvesting stem cells from your dog's body fat in the groin or behind the shoulder. The fat is mailed to the California company, which isolates the stem cells and mails them back for your vet to inject into the afflicted osteoarthritis joint or joints. You might opt for cheaper treatments, such as a combination of daily nutraceutical supplements such as chondroitin, glucosamine, MSM, fish or flaxseed oil, and turmeric, plus massage therapy.

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