Oral Care Options

Consumers are seeking oral care products that make it easy to ensure optimum dental health for their pets.

BY NORA CALEY

Dog owners can train their dogs to sit, stay and come, but they cannot train them to brush after every meal. But consumers know they need to keep their pets’ mouths healthy, not only to prevent bad breath, but to maintain the animal’s overall health.

According to the Haddonfield, N.J.-based American Veterinary Dental College, most dogs and cats have some evidence of periodontal disease by the time they are three years old. To combat this trend, manufacturers have developed options such as chews, treats, food, toothpastes, brushless products, water additives and sprays to promote oral hygiene and health—providing pet owners with a myriad of options, including alternatives to the often difficult and time-consuming task of teeth brushing.

“Brushing a pet’s teeth is always going to be the gold standard, but there may be reasons it isn’t done, or not done as frequently as it should be,” says Deborah Brown, vice president of Pet King Brands, Inc., in Westmont, Ill. “That can be due to limited time, pet’s acceptance of brushing and finding products the pet won’t have an aversion to.”

Pet King offers ZYMOX Brushless Enzymatic Oral Care Therapy, a line of products that were previously only available through veterinarians under the former brand name of Biotene Veterinarian Brushless Oral Care. The line includes a brushless dental gel, a water additive, and a breath freshening spray. The formula is based on the same technology as human products but modified for safe use for dogs and cats. The two enzyme systems inhibit odor-causing bacteria and eliminate plaque biofilm, all without brushing.

Others agree that shoppers are looking for an alternative to brushing their pets’ teeth. “We are all trying to find a way that’s not traumatic for the owner and the dog, and makes it enjoyable for the dog,” says Chris Bessent, DVM, founder and CEO of Herbsmith, Inc., in Hartland, Wis.

Few things are more enjoyable to a dog than a treat. Herbsmith’s Dog Breath Dental Treats are made with spearmint, parsley and sea algae to promote healthy teeth and fresh, minty breath. When the dog chomps on the treat, Bessent explains, the active ingredients coat the dog’s teeth and create a protective mechanism. The ingredients also break down bacteria and freshen the dog’s breath.

“If the dog has tartar, this makes the tartar soft, particularly at the gum line—and that’s where it matters,” she says. “It’s one thing to have terrible breath, but when the dog has tartar, it causes bacteria to flood the body and cause inflammation.”

Pet specialty retailers can expect the oral care category to continue growing as consumers learn more about the importance of routine dental care. And alternatives to brushing will likely be popular with those who are a little slower on the uptake. “For those pet parents who didn’t start the dental cleaning routine early, getting their dog to comply can be a challenge,” says Steven Shweky, president and CEO of Fetch… for Pets! “For this reason, manufacturers are offering a variety of products that help make dental care easy and fast such as foams, sprays, treats and water additives.”

That is not to say that brushing has become obsolete. Shweky says that core dental care products such as toothbrushes and toothpastes are still the category leaders that are driving sales. Fetch… for Pets! has launched several toothbrushes with patented designs that are made specifically for dogs’ teeth. The Triple Pet EZ Dog 3-sided toothbrush comes in a variety of sizes to fit each breed. The brush...
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Brushing Up

While stocking the right products is a great start, retailers must also be prepared to guide pet owners to the right oral care solutions. Humans know they play a role in their pets' health, says Susan Weiss, CEO and founder of Naples, Fla.-based Ark Naturals Products for Pets, manufacturer of Breath-Less Brushless-ToothPaste and Plaque-Zapper, and “a retailer has an amazing opportunity to partner with this universe of pet guardians.”

Pet owners may need help when selecting products for older pets, as these animals often have distinctly different needs than younger pets. Luckily, there is an emerging segment of the oral care category that focuses on products formulated specifically for older pets. “We realized that we needed to help senior pets, or pets that don’t prefer a hard or firm product,” says Weiss.

To this end, Ark Naturals introduced its Gray Muzzle Breath-Less Brushless-ToothPaste for Seniors, which is designed to help control plaque and tartar while promoting fresh breath. It is formulated with cinnamon, clove, spearmint and Stay-C 50, a form of vitamin C that the company says is a key nutrient in dental health.

Retailers that are looking to spread awareness about the importance of oral care for pets or educate pet own-
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Petzlife [petzlife.com]: The company offers No-Brush Oral Care Spray and Gel products. Last year, PetzLife incorporated the active ingredients into a natural healthy dental chew that features ridges that scrape the teeth and a blend of essential oils and extracts to help remove excess calcium in saliva that could otherwise be deposited on the teeth as calculus. PetzLife also presented 1-oz. Complete Oral Care Travel Size Gels in peppermint and salmon flavor. There are also Complete Oral Care Gel Pouches, a one-week Trial Size with a coupon for full-size bottles.

TropiClean [tropiclean.com]: The new Fresh Breath Drops focus on providing the easiest solution for pet owners to help keep their pet’s breath fresh, with no brushing required. The human simply adds three drops to the pet’s water bowl every time it is refilled and will begin to see results as quickly as one week. Fresh Breath Drops are tasteless and odorless. The product is designed to be an easy solution to help prevent periodontal disease and bad breath.

Vets Plus, Inc. [vets-plus.com]: The company offers KaNoodles Premium Dental Chews for dogs. The chews feature deep grooves and reach down to the base of the tooth to remove plaque. Because the chews are extruded like a noodle and then naturally air-dried, they remain flexible and will not cause gum damage as dogs chew. KaNoodles are made from wholesome grains and are completely digestible. Made from human-grade ingredients, the chews contain no preservatives, GMOs, artificial colors or added sugars.

Indigenous Pet Products [indigenouspet.com]: The new formulation of Pege-tables Nature’s Dog Chews feature dental benefits in addition to improvements in taste and texture. The new Pegetables are more pliable, creating a longer-lasting treat with more opportunity to mechanically remove plaque and tartar. Pegetables are available in three flavors and shapes—Sweet Potato, Pea and Carrot—and they contain vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and other nutrients. The chews are corn-, wheat-, grain- and gluten-free, and are available in various weights and sizes for small and large dogs.

ers on the many options available will find the category’s vendors ready and willing to help. “Educating our retail partners is very important, and we want to be a resource,” says Lion Houkes, global marketing director for Paragon Pet Products/Whimzees, which is headquartered in Veendam, The Netherlands. “We provide POS materials, from signage to printed collateral, and based on the exploding growth of this category, we encourage our retail partners to create a section dedicated to oral/dental health and good oral care.”

Houkes notes that the category is growing, and pet parents are seeking natural solutions made of high-quality ingredients. Whimzees Natural Dog Chews are knobby, whimsically-shaped toothbrushes—alligators and hedgehogs for example—that are designed to promote better circulation to gums and teeth. Limited-ingredient Whimzees Natural Dog Chews, made with natural and human-grade ingredients, are highly digestible, vegetarian and gluten and corn free. Whimzees recently added a Veggie Collection, featuring Whimzees Veggie Sausages and Whimzees Veggie Strips, featuring calcium and clove bud oil to promote dental health. The company has also launched the XXS Toothbrush for dogs that weigh five pounds or less, which Houkes says is an emerging segment in the U.S. and abroad.

Of course, cats need healthy teeth too, but they are choosy. To address this challenge, Emerald Pet Products in Walnut Creek, Calif., offers Smart n’ Tasty Feline Dental Treats in six all-natural, grain-free recipes. “Our treats were developed with all U.S. ingredients that notoriously picky cats absolutely love,” says Glenn A. Novotny, vice president of sales and marketing for Emerald Pet. “Owners get the benefit of clean teeth and fresh breath, while rewarding their cat with their new favorite treats.”

Novotny agrees that education and research are driving sales. The category is growing as consumers learn, from their veterinarians and from retailers, that bad breath is a result of poor oral hygiene.

The category leaders, Novotny says, are solution-oriented products that scrape teeth clean while also including additional natural breath fresheners. As the category expands, retailers and consumers are demanding better quality products and better features. “They pay more attention to ingredients, calories, and fat content when they make their purchasing decisions,” he says. PB