

Promoting Oral Care for Overall Pet Health

Help your customers outline a proper oral hygiene regimen for pets during early life stages to avoid more serious issues in the future.

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Often deemed one of the most difficult pet-care responsibilities by customers, maintaining proper oral health in animals is easy to overlook. While some pet parents don't want to bring animals to the veterinarian for a deep teeth cleaning that could require anesthesia, this becomes the only option when oral care has been neglected over a long period of time.

"It's estimated that only five percent of pet owners actually brush their pets' teeth daily, or even weekly," says Dan Archetti, national sales director of **Pet King Brands** headquartered in Westmont,

III. “Periodontal disease is preventable, but even the most motivated, well-intentioned pet owner may have difficulty incorporating oral care into a daily routine.”

Establishing a dental care regimen when pets are young could improve overall health later in life, but many pet parents don’t recognize the importance of oral care until a problem arises. As Kerri DaSilva, brand manager at Tampa, Fla.-based **Ark Naturals**, explains, the root of serious dental problems begins early in life, with 80 percent of pets suffering from a certain level of periodontal disease by the age of four.

“Periodontal disease begins with gingivitis, which is an inflammation of the gum tissue near the tooth base related to the build-up of dental plaque (tartar) on the tooth surface,” she said. “Plaque-causing bacteria secrete enzymes that irritate the gum tissue. In the next few years, tartar builds up and becomes mineralized; this is called ‘dental calculus.’”

Poor Oral Care Risks

Pets are often susceptible to many of the same health issues that humans face during their lifetimes. Similar to humans, pets can develop periodontal disease if their oral hygiene is neglected by the humans who care for them. The development of a periodontal disease can lead to more serious health issues in the other areas of a pet’s body.

“According to Bridge Park Animal Hospital, bacteria from periodontal disease can filter into their bloodstream and travel to major organs including liver, kidneys and heart, putting your pet at risk of developing health problems that extend beyond the mouth,” says Michelle McPherson, marketing director of Wentzville, Mo.-based **TropiClean Pet Products**.

Early warning signs could alert pet parents to the oral health issues that their animals face. Remaining aware of the most seemingly harmless changes in an animal can mean the difference between making smaller, healthy changes early on and encountering life-threatening issues later in life.

“The first sign of neglecting dental care in your pet is bad breath,” says Glenn Novotny, president and chief executive officer at **Emerald Pet Products**, based in Walnut Creek, Calif. “Providing both dogs

and cats with dental chews and treats, designed specifically for dental chewing, aids in the removal of tartar and plaque.”

Making Dental Health a Priority

Once pet parents recognize the different threats that can arise from providing insufficient dental care to their animals, many begin to prioritize finding solutions, but might be overwhelmed. Many solutions exist to solve the different issues faced by consumers, but these pet parents rely on local retailers to assist in identifying the appropriate option for their specific animal’s needs.

Citing [American Pet Products Association](#) research that reveals 55 percent of pet parents encounter difficulties when searching for the correct oral hygiene products to suit their animals’ needs, McPherson outlines how her company works with retail partners to provide the most informative experience to customers.

“We provide educational resources to our retailers, which then the retailer can educate the pet parent on the importance of dental health,” she says. “Once the pet parent is in the store, we provide merchandising displays that help educate them and lead them to finding the specific solution that fits their lifestyle.”

Predicting the Future

Pet owners who are new to exploring solutions in pet oral care will seek guidance to choose the products that will most benefit their pets. Though pet dental issues are similar to those faced by humans, animals have slightly different needs, especially considering life stage or whether there has been lifelong oral care.

“Retailers can help their customers by giving customized recommendations based on their dog’s size, age and other health needs,” says Jessica Young, marketing manager of [Pet Care at W.F. Young, Inc.](#), in East Longmeadow, Mass. “We believe a dental chew should not just provide an abrasive texture, but aid in health and nutrition through what’s digested—supporting overall health, hip and joints, and skin and coat.”

In addition to multipurpose products that address multiple pet health issues, trends will continue to support greater transparency in ingredient sourcing.

“The focus going forward with dental care will continue to become hyper focused on ingredients and their purpose,” says Novotny. “Pet parents want to see that what they are feeding for dental care is making a difference.”

When manufacturers educate retailers regarding how their products can promote dental health, store associates can use this information to help customers design a comprehensive oral hygiene program for pets. For some retailers, maximizing opportunities by observing prime promotional time for different products is key to raising awareness among pet parents about the importance of oral care to overall health.

“Pura Naturals Pet will kick off the new year by promoting Dog Dental Month in February,” reveals **Pura Naturals Pet** president and chief merchandising officer, Beth Sommers, whose headquarters are located in Ardsley, N.Y. “We have a variety of educational documents, customer testimonials and POP shelf talkers that highlight the features and benefits of our products.”

While identifying specific solutions for each individual case is important, the initial goal of sales associates should be to emphasize the importance of oral care when speaking with pet parents. Once customers recognize the critical role dental hygiene plays in overall pet health, sales associates can work with clients to develop the ideal regimen to maintain healthy oral hygiene habits. **PB**

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