



Consistent ear maintenance prevents minor issues from becoming chronic problems.

Ear Cleaning Aids for Pets

Offer a comprehensive variety of ear cleaning aids to help your customers prevent painful and expensive ear problems in their pets. By Lisa Plummer

Ear cleaning, like regular grooming, dental cleaning and vet visits, is an essential part of preventive health care for dogs and cats. Consistent ear maintenance staves off infections and parasitic infestations, and helps prevent minor issues from developing into chronic problems.

Often caused by bacteria, yeast and mites, ear infections are common in dogs and cats because their deep ear canals trap moisture, dirt and earwax. Left untreated, these infections can spread through the eardrum and into the middle ear, leading to deafness and deep-seated infections that require long-term therapy.

Regular ear cleaning can prevent such problems and save pets from needless suffering, said Susan Weiss, president of Ark Naturals Products for Pets (Naples, Fla.). "Ear yeast infections as well as outbreaks of ear mites are excruciating for both dogs and cats. [They] may cause damage to their ears by scratching, causing the ears to bleed. For dogs, a common symptom is shaking their heads, and it's possible that

intense shaking may damage small blood vessels, creating sores or hematomas."

Good ear maintenance should always be a priority, agreed Bob Brady, quality control and production manager for Thomas Laboratories (Tolleson, Ariz.). But owners on tight budgets should be especially vigilant if they want to prevent needless veterinary expenses, he said. "Unclean and ungroomed ears can lead to nasty ear infections and pests, such as mites, which can cause pain and a hefty vet bill," said Brady. "Ear health is very important for your pet and pocketbook, especially in today's economy."

However, when it comes to consistent ear care, a lot of pet owners appear to be remiss. According to the Veterinary Pet Insurance Co. (Brea, Calif.), canine ear infections are the No. 1 reason for vet visits in the United States. In 2009, the pet insurance agency received about 68,000 claims for ear-related vet visits, with an average cost of \$100 per trip.

As a retailer, you can help your

customers prevent these painful and often expensive problems by offering a comprehensive variety of ear cleaning aids as well as taking time to educate consumers about the importance of good ear health.

Here's a look at a wide range of ear cleaning aids you can stock to help owners keep Fido and Fluffy's ears clean.

Convenience, Ease of Use

The key to preventing infections is keeping ears clean and dry, according to Frank Pohl, owner of Bio-Groom (Longview, Texas), which offers several easy-to-use ear cleaning solutions for canines and felines.

"Our products do more than just clean the ear; they get you a good, clean ear that's free of bacteria and fungus issues," said Pohl. "They won't introduce any oils and will help maintain a dry, clean, germ-free and healthy ear if used regularly."

Bio-Groom's gentle Ear-Care Ear Cleaner and Ear Wax Remover helps dissolve and clean away wax buildup without leaving the ear canal oily, sticky or gummy. Ear Care Ear Cleaner Pads use the same formula in pre-moistened cotton pads. Both contain eucalyptus oil, a natural disinfectant, plus boric and salicylic acids for their antiseptic and exfoliant properties.

Other products rely on a foaming or bubbling action to clean the ear. For example, Pet King Brands (Westmont, Ill.) offers Zymox Enzymatic Ear Cleanser, a no-muss, no-fuss foaming cleaner that gently eliminates dirt, wax, fungus and bacteria—common sources of infection that result in smelly, red and tender ears.

"Zymox Enzymatic Ear Cleanser contains gentle surfactants and the patented LP3 Enzyme System to naturally and gently cleanse ears," said Deborah Brown, Pet King's vice president. "Both the enzymes and surfactants are pH-balanced to provide no-sting cleansing ... [while] the enzymes react with the gunk within the ears without scrubbing, water, harsh chemicals or detergents. For pets plagued with constant infections, weekly use will prevent [them] from occurring."

Similarly, Earoxide, a cleansing solution with carbamide peroxide and glycerin,



Convenient ear cleaning aids—such as Ear Care Ear Cleaner Pads from Bio-Groom, Clean Ears Wipes from Cardinal Laboratories and Zymox Enzymatic Ear Cleanser from Pet King Brands—make it easier for owners to stick to a regular ear cleaning regimen.

harnesses bubbling action to quickly and painlessly dissolve dirt and wax.

“With Earoxide, no swabbing or probing of the ear canal is required,” said Carol Kisill, a product manager for Tomlyn Products, a division of Vetoquinol USA Inc. (Fort Worth, Texas). “This is important because compliance with an ear cleansing regimen is an important factor in maintaining ear health and good grooming. The simpler and easier the ear cleansing product is, the more likely it will be used by the pet owner and accepted by the pet.”

Gold Medal Clean Ears from Cardinal Laboratories Inc. (Azusa, Calif.) also uses fizzing action to break up and dislodge earwax, dirt, dust, pollen and debris trapped in the ear canal. The alcohol-free liquid uses dioctyl sodium sulfosuccinate, a common anionic surfactant, to dissolve ear wax and buildup and reduce odors. A mild cleansing liquid washes the ear canal while the aloe vera soothes the ear and reduces irritation.

“The dog hears or feels the slight bubbling action—sort of like the fizz in a soft drink—and he shakes his head, dislodging debris in the ear,” said Barbara Denzer, vice president of marketing. “It’s very effective at clearing out the ear canal, deodorizing the ear and helping prevent infection.”

Also part of Cardinal’s Gold Medal ear care product portfolio for professional groomers: Clean & Dry Ears, which goes on as a lotion but dries into a powder to help soothe and dry up itchy or weeping ears, and Clean Ears Wipes, a gentle,

convenient cleaning wipe made with green tea, aloe vera, lemon and marigold.

Natural Cleansing

Many herbal extracts and essential oils are known for their natural cleaning, antibacterial, antifungal, deodorizing

and pest-detering properties. Several pet product manufacturers have capitalized on these ingredients to create gentle, effective ear cleaning aids.

For example, Cardinal Laboratories uses marigold, St. John’s Wort, chamomile, sage oil and aloe vera in a witch hazel base to soften earwax and deodorize pets’ ears in its Herbal Ear Wash, part of the company’s Pet Botanics Naturals line.

“Many people prefer natural products for many different reasons, so we try to offer customers what they want by giving them choices,” said Denzer. “Although it may not work as fast as the bubbling action of our Clean Ears product, it accomplishes the same thing: cleaning, deodorizing and reducing moisture in the ear that might cause infection.”

Creating natural alternatives for its customers is also important to Tomlyn, which offers Ear Wash with Tea Tree Oil. Not only does it safely and effectively dissolve wax and foreign debris, it can be used every day, especially after bathing or swimming, and is gentle enough for delicate puppy or kitten ears. As a natural astringent, tea tree oil works to create

Selling Ear Cleaning Products

EDUCATE YOURSELF AND your staff about ear care products and proper ear care techniques so you can create greater awareness among pet owners and move these items off your shelves.

Manufacturers suggest displaying ear care products next to shampoos and grooming products, creating special discounts or promotions and cross-merchandising them with related products. Including samples of ear cleaners in new pet owner packs is another great sales technique, said Frank Pohl, owner of Bio-Groom (Longview, Texas).

“[If retailers] sell puppies and want to sell samples of puppy food and shampoo, why not put a small bottle of ear cleaner in there, too?” said Pohl. “That’s the salesmanship of the store and the staff—to think far ahead. Maybe make it a standard operating procedure that if you sell a new puppy, you recommend this product, that food and this [ear cleaning] product. It’s just good customer relations.”

Besides offering a comprehensive selection of ear care products, be sure to stress the importance of regular ear cleaning. For example, recommend that customers examine and clean their dogs’ ears weekly—and especially before or after a bath.

Taking time to educate consumers will not only help you sell more ear care products but it also will help your customers keep their pets healthier—and out of the vet’s office.

“As with humans, the emphasis right now is prevention,” said Dr. Phil Brown, senior vice president of marketing and regulatory affairs for Nutri-Vet Nutritionals (Boise, Idaho). “If you routinely flush your dog’s ears with a proper solution, you’re going to prevent problems from arising. You’re saving money and helping your dog be more comfortable, because by the time dogs start shaking their heads, it’s already quite bothersome.”

—Lisa Plummer



Offering natural options is always a good idea. Products like Ears All Right from Ark Naturals, Ear Cleanser from Cain & Able, Ear Wash with Tea Tree Oil from Tomlyn Products and Ear Ease from Thomas Laboratories all use herbal extracts and essential oils known for their natural cleaning, antibacterial, antifungal or deodorizing properties.

a dry, hostile environment for bacteria, said Kisill.

"Ear Wash with Tea Tree Oil is a natural formula for cleaning the ear canal of dogs and cats," said Kisill. "For those pet owners who want a natural care solution for their pet, they can use Ear Wash with Tea Tree Oil for their regular ear cleaning."

EcoWellDog Inc. (Austin, Texas) also uses herbs and botanical ingredients in its products because they're safe and effective, said Lorna Paxton Ladd, president.

"Herbs and botanicals have been used for millennia in solving various health problems, so they have definitely passed the test of time," said Paxton Ladd. "Herbs are a wonderful alternative to pharmaceuticals. Not only are herbal products less expensive than drugs, but they also offer results without side effects. Pharmaceutical ingredients like antibiotics may solve the immediate problem but chances are over time the dog will become immune to that ingredient."

EcoWellDog offers two lines of all-natural ear cleaning solutions: the Cain & Able line and the happytails Canine Spa Line.

Cain & Able All Natural Ear Cleanser gently eliminates moisture, wax and dirt buildup without harsh detergents or artificial fragrances. Essential oils and extracts such as lavender, eucalyptus, tea tree,

citronella and willow bark help reduce inflammation and soothe and disinfect the ear, while aloe vera moisturizes irritated skin.

In its happytails Canine Spa Line, EcoWellDog offers the two-part Ear Aid for external and internal ear cleaning: Ear Wipes are pre-moistened, alcohol-free wipes infused with colloidal silver and witch hazel to remove wax and debris and inhibit bacteria; and Ear Clear solution helps prevent bacterial and yeast infections and ear mites inside the ear canal. Ear Clear uses organic comfrey and calendula to help soothe, heal and protect, and contains arnica and chaparral oils to reduce pain and discomfort caused by inflammation.

Thomas Laboratories also offers two naturally medicinal ear cleaners: Ear Ease is a blend of d-limonene, citronella, cedarwood and eucalyptus oils that removes wax buildup and dead parasites and controls odors; and D-Plus Ear Drops contain soothing neem oil, oatmeal, aloe vera and vitamins A, D and E.

Finally, Ark Naturals makes Ears All Right, an all-natural ear cleaning solution with an appealing scent. Made with a combination of herbal extracts, including calendula, rosemary, myrrh and cinnamon leaf oils, as well as whole leaf aloe vera gel, the solution helps

inhibit the growth of bacteria, viruses and yeast, reduces inflammation and allergy symptoms, and helps soothe itchy or irritated ears.

Species-Specific

Dogs have an L-shaped inner ear that easily traps water and debris at the lower end of the ear canal, so they tend to be more susceptible than cats to bacterial and yeast infections. This is especially true for breeds with long earflaps, those that spend a lot of time in water and dogs prone to allergies. Cats, on the other hand, tend to be more susceptible to ear mites than bacterial or yeast infections.

Some companies address these differences with species-specific products. For example, Nutri-Vet Nutritionals L.L.C. (Boise, Idaho) offers a full line of dog-specific ear cleaning products, including Ear Cleanse for Dogs, an antimicrobial, antiseptic liquid to flush out wax and matter, and Ear Dry Cream for Dogs, which keeps ears clean and dry without alcohol. Most effective when used after Ear Cleanse, the cream provides a protective moisture barrier inside the ear canal. For owners who regularly use both products, the Ear Care Kit for Dogs includes both products in one pack.

Nutri-Vet Sport Ear Wash with Aloe Vera for Dogs is made especially for active dogs that spend a lot of time in the water. With the same formulation as Ear Cleanse, it is suitable for regular use before or after swimming.

Carrying species-specific ear cleaning aids like these from Nutri-Vet Nutritionals can help you match your customers with the products their pets need.



Because some dog owners like the convenience of pre-moistened cleaning pads, Nutri-Vet also offers Ear Cleansing Pads for Dogs, which easily remove dirt and wax buildup from ear flaps and around ear canals.

Nutri-Vet also makes two cleaners especially for the delicate feline ear. Ear Cleanse for Cats is an antimicrobial, antiseptic cleaning solution in a soothing aloe vera base. Scientifically formulated to gently clean, dry, deodorize and acidify a cat's ear canal, it's particularly useful for preventing ear infections and mites in multiple-cat households.

Nutri-Vet's Ear Cleansing Pads for Cats contain a soothing and nonirritating formula to gently remove dirt and wax buildup from ear flaps and around ear canals. It won't sting or burn and is gentle enough to use daily.

Some products are especially well-suited for dogs with hairy inner ear flaps, such as miniature poodles and schnauzers. These and similar breeds could benefit from ear powders, which make it easier to grip and remove excess

hair from the ear canals, keeping the ears dry and preventing infections.

Cardinal's Gold Medal Pets line includes Groomers Ear Powder, a drying ear grooming powder that sucks up moisture, reduces bacteria growth, eliminates odors and helps relieve irritated, itchy ears. Similarly, Bio-Groom's Ear-Fresh Ear Powder keeps ears dry and free of odor, and works great for hand-stripping.

Thomas Labs offers D-Plus Ear Dust, with diatomaceous earth, known for its inherent drying and pest-controlling properties. "Our Ear Dust is a great alternative to traditional powders, as it also contains sulfur as an antiseptic and orange peel powder to prevent ear mites and other pests," said Brady. "It helps when grooming the ears and for gripping ear hair."

No matter how gentle or easy a product

is to use, plenty of dogs and cats will fuss when you tamper with their ears. Owners can make ear cleaning easier for them and their pets by establishing a solid ear cleaning routine from a young age, according to Dr. Phil Brown, Nutri-Vet's senior vice president of marketing and regulatory affairs.

"The sooner you start these routine prevention techniques in the puppy, the easier it will be when they're older," said Brown. "This is part of maintaining the health of your animal, so don't wait until your dog has an ear infection. Every week, look in his ears and use these cleaning solutions. At the end of the day, you're preventing a problem because problems are always more expensive and painful." ■

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