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Sleep, snore products gain momentum during pandemic

By Nora Caley - 07/02/2020

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Sleep? What's that?

As consumers look for a way to get a decent night's sleep before, during and after the coronavirus crisis, retail industry officials said they increasingly are turning to in-store solutions to help them catch an extra 40 winks.

According to IRI, a Chicago-based market research firm, for the 52 weeks ending March 22, sales of sleeping remedies totaled nearly \$1.04 billion in total U.S. outlet (grocery, drug, mass market, military and select club and dollar stores), an increase of 17.9% compared with the same period the previous year. The average price per unit was \$7.80, up 52 cents. Also according to IRI, sales of sleeping aid tablets increased 19.1% to nearly \$874.7 million, and sales of sleeping aid liquids increased 12.1% to \$163.9 million.

Now with the pandemic, many think the category is ripe for future growth. “With the state of the national pandemic, there is a greater level of stress, anxiety and depression, and consumers are looking for natural alternatives to help aid in restful sleep, relaxation and reduction in anxiety,” said Jon Romanow, director of marketing at Pleasant Prairie, Wis.-based Quest Products. “The pandemic is stimulating more consumer demand for these products and, thus, the category. Maintaining restful sleep will continue to be important for future health management, stress reduction and, at the time travel becomes in higher demand, more rest during flights and travel will be important.”



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Leading the charge is a growing interest in natural products, which contain either the now ubiquitous melatonin or other emerging ingredients that are capturing attention.

“More and more, we are seeing that consumers don’t want to rely on prescription drugs to help them when they are having trouble falling asleep,” said Kimberly Vigilante, senior vice president of wholesale sales and marketing at Ronkonkoma, N.Y.-based Piping Rock, which makes the Nature’s Truth brand. “They want natural solutions that they can feel good about and that are efficacious for their needs.”

Melatonin has become the go-to drug-free remedy for help with sleep issues, Vigilante said, and now consumers are looking for more. “Products that blend other calming ingredients like L-theanine and ashwagandha are also on the rise,” she said. “They give the consumer more options to decide which product type is right for them when it’s time to wind down for the night.”

Nature's Truth offers a breadth of natural solutions to address consumers' sleep concerns and that the company said meet high standards of purity and potency. The brand offers such products as Fast Acting Liquid Melatonin 10 mg and L-theanine 200 mg, and fast-dissolve offerings in a range of melatonin strengths, including 300 mcg, 1 mg, 3 mg, 5 mg, 10 mg and 12 mg. Everyone experiences sleep challenges differently, Vigliante said, so retailers should have assortments that appeal to consumers looking for a low strength melatonin for occasional sleeplessness, as well as others looking for stronger doses.

"The sleep and air categories are growing organically, with more consumer focus away from medicated products and an interest towards natural alternatives," Romanow said. "We have seen this with innovation and consumer interest in non-medicated offerings, including sleep dilators, filters, patches and more. Also, natural supplements appear to be gaining traction, including melatonin-based vitamins, gummies and supplements."

Another natural ingredient getting attention is CBD. Earlier this year, Charlotte, N.C. based cbdMD launched CBD PM softgel capsules as a convenient, travel-friendly version of its CBD PM tincture. "The most significant shift is the trend towards more natural sleep solutions," said Pancho Mangual, executive vice president of sales.

"Consumers are now more likely to make decisions about products and brands that align with their lifestyle choices."

Consumers also are more likely to choose products that have such certifications and registrations as being produced using good manufacturing practices and NSF International registration. "Authenticity, sustainability and transparency have become critical factors for many customers," Mangual said.

Some CBD companies are offering topical products. Herb Tech Pharmaceuticals, based in Beverly, Mass., offers Be Sleepy, a lotion the company said "could help people achieve their sleep potential" and combines CBD with botanical extracts, including melatonin, lavender, valerian, hops extract and others. "Anxiety and stress are felt by most people in the world today, which can have major impact on sleep quality," said Herb Tech senior vice president Laura Stephens. "Consumers are

trending to be their healthiest by either maintaining their current healthy lifestyle habits or creating new healthy lifestyle habits. Sleep is one of the most important factors in maintaining a healthy lifestyle and immune system.”

“Consumers are looking for personalized solutions rather than a one-size-fits-all. Sleep patterns and causes of sleep disruptions are different for everyone, and one way they differ is by age group.”

Annie Chen, Hyland's vice president of marketing

The Right Mix

Sleep is a high-trial category, according to Jim Creagan, president of Cornwall, N.Y.-based Randob Labs, so retailers need to offer products that meet multiple customer needs. “This means an assortment of OTC and natural sleep aid products with at least the most popular delivery systems, such as capsules, gummies, liquids, etc.,” he said. “Consumers will base their purchasing decisions on the dosage format, brand and value.” Also, retailers need to invest in digital technology, as consumers will likely continue to embrace online shopping after the coronavirus pandemic subsides, Creagan said.

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Randob Labs makes Dormin, which the company said has been trusted with consumers since the 1950s and is the original nighttime sleep aid brand. The brand recently refreshed its packaging to emphasize key messaging. The sleep aid, with the active ingredient diphenhydramine, comes in mini capsules. Creagan said that a 2019 consumer research study found that 65% of current sleep-aid users said they are more likely to purchase a brand with two mini capsules than a single-dose, larger tablet product.

The variety in the sleep set should include not just homeopathic and allopathic products, but also products for all ages. “Consumers are looking for personalized solutions rather than a one-size-fits-all,” said Annie Chen, vice president of

marketing at Los Angeles-based Hyland's. "Sleep patterns and causes of sleep disruptions are different for everyone, and one way they differ is by age group."

For example, Chen said, teens are dealing with the stress of school, while older women may be losing sleep due to such menopause symptoms as hot flashes and night sweats. "It's hard to reach some of these smaller and underserved consumer groups when they don't know where to find products designed for their unique needs once they're in a traditional retail store," she said. She also said that retailers can make the section easier for people to shop by communicating that the store has products just for these consumers by creating dedicated areas within the store or by highlighting small dedicated areas within a larger shelf set.

Hyland's expanded its sleep portfolio with products dedicated to teens, adults and seniors. In addition to Hyland's Calms Forté for adults, there is Serene for young adults that helps with focus and sleep, and Dr. Wise Sleep for women going through menopause. All are made with natural active ingredients, are free of hormones, and have no known drug interactions or side effects.

The Air That We Breathe

The sleep category includes not just products to help consumers sleep, but also items designed to help people sleep without snoring. Quest Products makes sleepWell, an internal nasal dilator for snoring relief. "With snoring the problem is not you, it's your partner," Romanow said. The product provides a drug-free, chemical-free and side effect free way to reduce snoring, and it contains essential oils including lavender, chamomile and ylang-ylang.

The company also recently launched breatheWell, a nasal filter designed for people interested in protection against the smallest of airborne particles and pollutants. It is drug-free and latex-free, and the rings are made of a surgical-grade polymer that is nontoxic.

The products are especially popular among millennials and Generation Z consumers, who are looking for unmedicated solutions, so there is an untapped opportunity to reach baby boomers and other age groups. Quest Products is doing its part by printing product information on the packaging. When people have

insomnia, they visit the store and start reading labels. “For this category, a lot of the messaging is on shelf,” Romanow said. “People depend on messaging on the packaging.” **dsn**

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