

a Shaggy tale

BY DR ALEX MELROSE

Shaggy is a gentle white English Bull Terrier that has led a tumultuous life.



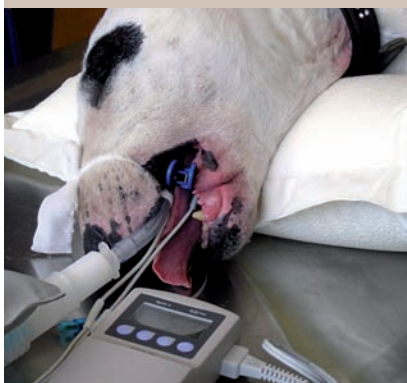
Here is Shaggy, who is going into surgery to have her badly decayed teeth removed.



Shaggy was weighed so we could calculate the exact dosages of anaesthetic, pain relief and medication needed for the operation.



Next we took a sample of blood to pick up on any undetected infections and assess how Shaggy's kidneys and liver would handle the anaesthesia.



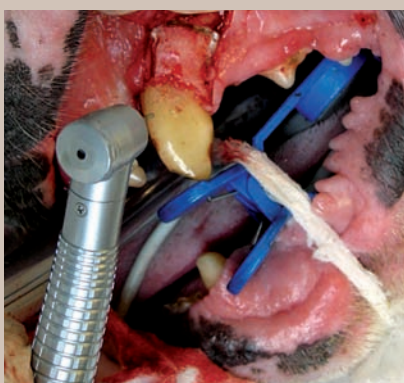
Shaggy's was pre-medicated and received an injection of Propofol. We then put in a breathing tube, which provided her with gaseous drugs to keep her asleep during the operation.



The nurses constantly monitored Shaggy's heart, breathing, temperature, and certain nerve reflexes. A pulse oximeter attached to her tongue told us how well she was oxygenating her body tissues while asleep.



You can see how decayed and chipped Shaggy's teeth were. This is the result of a lifetime of eating mainly soft foods, crunching excessively on sticks and rocks and never having her teeth brushed.



For the extraction of her decayed canine tooth, we exposed the massive tooth root. The high-speed drill then loosened the tooth ligaments, and an elevator gently lifted the tooth from its socket.

Despite many ups and downs, Shaggy has now reached the grand old age of 12. Her owners first found her as a youngster at Bull Terrier Rescue, where she was recovering from a fractured leg and ribs due to physical abuse. It was love at first sight and she soon settled into her new home in Ponsonby, Auckland. Shaggy responded well to their loving care, but unfortunately was abducted from her home by thieves looking for fighting dogs.

Shaggy's owners searched tirelessly for their beloved canine and eventually two appearances on *Crime Watch* led to the police identifying her at a gang house in Northland. She was taken into custody and despite her bedraggled features, her owners recognized her and they were reunited after 12 months apart! Fortunately, Shaggy was no good as a fighting dog because she was too passive, and unlike other dogs that were also stolen she lived to tell the tale.

Shaggy has recently been on a strict weight-loss programme, with reduced food intake and regular exercise. She dropped from 28kg to 22kg and became a much livelier dog, but was lacking energy and seemed subdued. A look into her mouth revealed the problem – extensive dental disease! It would be necessary to pull out some of the rotten teeth including a massive fang. We took some blood from Shaggy's trembling front leg and ran tests to check her red and white blood cells and organ functions. The results showed high levels of cholesterol and lipids in her blood, so sausages and bacon were permanently taken off the menu, and we prepared a somewhat nervous Shaggy for oral surgery.



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beginnings to adulthood



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prevention is the key

Dental disease is a common health problem in both dogs and cats, and can cause bad breath, swollen and bleeding gums, loose teeth, salivation, mouth rubbing and difficulty eating, and in severe cases can lead to periodontal (gum) disease and the spread of disease to other parts of the body, including the heart and kidneys.

For your pet's gums to stay healthy, its teeth need to be cleaned regularly. The easiest way to do this is to provide it with dental toys, chews and specially formulated foods, designed to keep its teeth clean and prevent the build-up of plaque and tartar. Most of these products have a mild abrasive action that wipes away the thin layer of protein that builds up on teeth, while others are treated with enzymes to reduce bacteria. Brushing your pet's teeth will also go a long way in preventing dental disease. While some pets resist brushing, most eventually accept it, especially if you start when they are young.

Another important part of your pet's oral health is a veterinary examination of their mouth and teeth during their annual check-up – also a good time to ask for advice on home care. As well as checking for plaque, calculus, or gingivitis, your vet will see if there are any broken, missing or discolored teeth, and check for signs of gum disease. They may require your pet to come back, to clean its teeth and examine the mouth more thoroughly under anaesthetic, revealing any further work that needs doing. Dental X-rays may also be taken for problems that can't be seen visually.

The moral of this story is that not only will you prevent dental disease by taking better care of your pet's teeth now, but it will have a much happier, healthier and longer life.

For more information and to find products that have the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC) seal of approval for plaque and tartar control, visit www.vohc.org



We used plenty of dissolving
sutures to close up the huge space
left behind.



We then removed
four more smaller,
decayed teeth.



Shaggy's recovery was monitored, and she was
given antibiotics to treat gingival infection, and
administered painkillers.



Shaggy came back for two follow-ups. Her mouth has
healed fantastically well and she has a new lease on life
after removing the focus of infection from her body.
From now on, she can look forward to both an improved
quality and duration of life. We have Shaggy on special
dental diet biscuits, which provide effective abrasion
while being chewed, and keep her teeth gleaming
white. Her owner has also been diligently brushing
Shaggy's teeth weekly with a super-soft dog toothbrush
and some multi-flavoured dog toothpaste, to great effect.

how to brush your pet's teeth

Aim to brush your pet's teeth two to three times a week, using a specially formulated pet toothpaste – never use the human variety, as it's not designed to be swallowed and you can't rinse a pet's mouth out! Place a small amount of the toothpaste on your finger, and offer it to your pet daily for several days as a treat. This will condition your pet to view brushing as fun and rewarding. Once your pet accepts toothpaste, use your index finger to simulate the brushing motion of a toothbrush, while praising your pet. After a week, introduce a soft-bristled pet toothbrush by making small, circular strokes at the gum line. Start from the back teeth and work forward and around to the other side, concentrating on the outside surface, and pay particular attention to the canine and cheek teeth.

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