

DUFFY Hip Dysplasia doesn't hold him back. By Peg Caldwell

We never intended to get a puppy in 2005. Our 10 year old Beardie had some health problems and he really wanted to be an only dog. But at our club's Beardie Bash, a 4.5 month old black and white pup crawled onto my lap. That was it. Duffy became ours and was a typical, cute, lovable, bouncy Beardie pup.



*Duffy's first day in our family*



*Duffy at 6 months*

About two months later as I was taking him out on leash, I heard a clicking noise. I thought it must be his tags clicking against each other. No one else noticed it, but it was there. Over the next days I took off his

tags, changed his leash and trimmed his nails. I could still hear the click and I was pretty sure it was coming from him! He seemed normal with no sign of pain or reluctance to walk or play. A few days later I was behind him as he ran up a couple of steps. His right rear foot hovered over the step but never touched it. He was hopping up the stairs! We took him to the vet. He was a trooper as they manipulated his legs and then took x-rays. It was terrible news – severe bilateral hip dysplasia. How could it be -- he ran like a normal puppy and never showed any discomfort or hesitation to get up? Well it was. Our perfect puppy wasn't perfect.



*He acted like a normal 6 month old Beardie puppy*

We saw several orthopedic surgeons over the next few weeks. We could take a conservative approach and limit his activity, strengthen his muscles, use supplements and pain relievers, try acupuncture, avoid high impact activities and hope for the best. None of the doctors recommended this because he was already favoring one side.

We were lucky Duffy gave us a sign. The disease is not always readily observable in very young dogs. Hip dysplasia is an abnormal formation of the hip socket that can eventually cause lameness and painful arthritis of the joints. In a normal hip joint, the head of the femur (ball) fits snugly into the joint socket (acetabulum.) With CHD, because the joint is loose, the dog's leg bone moves around too much, causing painful wear and tear. Simply put, Duffy's "ball and socket" did not fit well. There was little choice but surgery. He was too young for THR (total hip replacement) and at the time, the best options were TPO (triple pelvic osteotomy) or FHO surgery (femoral head osteotomy.) There are some additional surgical options now.

After talking to owners of similarly affected dogs and several veterinarians, including our friend and advisor Linda Aronson, we chose TPO surgery. There was no time to lose because TPO surgery must be done prior to any arthritic changes and before the dog is 10-12 months old. This procedure involves cutting the pelvic bone in three places and rotating the segments to provide a better socket for the ball and decrease hip laxity. Surgical steel implants and screws are used to hold the reshaped bone in place. The hope is the procedure will provide increased stability and comfort for the dog.



*Typical x-ray after TPO surgery (stock photo, not Duffy)*

Our plan was to do the worst side first, complete his recovery and then do the second hip. Both hips appeared equally affected on x-ray, but he was still weight bearing on the left side. So, just a couple of weeks before his 8 month birthday, he had surgery on the right hip.

After a TPO, activity must be restricted to leash exercise until the osteotomy sites (places where the bone was cut) are healed. The dog must be closely confined and supervised to prevent overuse of the leg during the healing period.

We set up the house with huge crates in several places, a potty box with grass on our deck (which Duffy refused to use,) lots of "brain" toys (which didn't hold his attention,) stuffed kongs and yummy bones to keep him occupied when he came home. He was a sorry looking little thing at first, but within a few days he was feeling somewhat better. We had to carry him out to potty breaks and bring him right back in. Try keeping an almost 8 month old Bearded puppy quiet all of the time. That was one of the hardest parts.



*Third day home from surgery*

We loved our orthopedic surgeon. He took Duffy home with him the night after surgery so he could keep an eye on him. He did acupuncture following the procedure and suggested a couple of supplements for us to consider long term.

The incidence of complications after TPO surgery is low. However, after three weeks we noticed he was clicking again. We knew there could be trouble if he somehow “escaped” confinement or had too much activity before he healed. We had had followed the rules to the letter and he had not escaped. We rushed back to the surgeon and learned one set of screws had come loose. So Duffy went back into surgery for a revision. This time the loose set of screws went into his sacrum. He was back home the next day and we started recovery all over again.



*Let me out of here!*



*Incisions beginning to heal while he works on a marrow bone*

It seemed like forever that we carried him outside to potty breaks and kept him either in a huge crate or on leash in the house. We slept next to his crate the first weeks and Kevin read him the newspaper every morning. No wonder Duffy is so smart! This time everything healed well. It was nearly 3 months before he could be off leash in the house – and even then we blocked the stairs, restricted access to beds and turned the couches and chairs over so he wouldn't jump up. At a little over 4 months post-op we had our puppy back.



*Duffy's crates were big enough for both of us*

He was finally free to be a puppy again (some restrictions) and it was time to do the other hip. He faced another 3-4 months of recovery and we didn't know how we could put Duffy through that again. In talking to the orthopedic surgeon, we opted to skip the second surgery, work on strengthening his musculature and avoid high impact activities like agility and herding. His physical therapy included exercises, the pool, acupuncture and massage.



*Duffy in the pool – he did more floating than paddling.*

We expected Duffy to be limited during his lifetime. At the very least we expected to restrict his activities and be prepared with pain medications. Although we haven't had Duffy participate in activities like herding or agility, we decided to let Duffy "be a dog" – even if it meant some issues later on. He is active in our yard and with other dogs, has gone to obedience and rally classes, plays a mean game of fetch and is as fast as he is smart. He gets a joint supplement (Canine Corta-flx), an anti-inflammatory nutraceutical (Duralactin), and fish oil daily. He has acupuncture and he gets regular laser treatments and massage. Even though he wasn't showing signs of distress, we gave him a 9 month course of Adequan a couple of years ago. We think it was beneficial because he's as just as active as he was several years ago. I have pain medication on hand, but he hasn't needed it. He is on the small side and we keep his weight down. He eats a mixture of home cooked and grainfree kibble.





Duffy turned 9 in March. At the time of his diagnosis and surgery we hoped he would have 5-6 relatively active years – but he's still going strong. His is a happy story. His x-rays show significant arthritic changes and even the corrected hip looks bad. But he's active and runs as fast as our two younger Beardies. He is protective of his hip areas and he occasionally takes a short time out to rest or watch. But he's very much a part of all activities and he is clearly in charge of our household. He's truly a special Beardie and we're lucky to have him in our family.



*Taking a break at 9 years old*



*Duffy at 9.5 years old*