

News of the World magazine  
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BRITAIN'S BIGGEST  
WEEKLY GLOSSY



**IT'S A  
GIFT!**

**JAMIE'S TURKEY  
WITH A TWIST**

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SALES SAVVY**

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**One secret wedding, two baby  
wishes - three TV divas reveal all**



# 'Doctors made my new breast from my tummy'

Tara Chalmers could cope with losing her breast to cancer. What she couldn't face was having it rebuilt using a silicone implant

BY JILL FOSTER & KIM GREGORY

**W**hen Tara Chalmers found a lump in her left breast, all her instincts told her it was cancer. The disease had already claimed the lives of three female members of her family, and she was determined it wouldn't take hers.

Tests confirmed the worst, and the young mother of three immediately agreed to a mastectomy, which was followed by gruelling chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

As her hair fell out, and the treatment scorched the skin where her breast had been, Tara felt as if her whole body was under attack. So when the subject of reconstructive surgery was raised, she knew she couldn't face having an implant.

"The tumour had been like a foreign body inside me. So when it came to reconstruction, I hated the idea of having a silicone or saline implant put in," says Tara, a bank worker from Worthing, West Sussex.

Tara, now 39, was advised to see Charles Nduka, an expert in reconstructive surgery, who suggested a more natural way for her to get back her pre-cancer bust. He told her about a pioneering procedure where skin and fat is taken from the stomach and reattached to arteries in the chest to form a new breast. The surgery — deep inferior epigastric perforator, or DIEP — means the patient gets a tummy tuck as well as a new bust.

"It felt right because it was using flesh that was already part of me," Tara explains.

Her ordeal had begun in October 2004 →



Tara's partner Brian supported her throughout her ordeal



## Body & Soul



Tara took part in Cancer Research UK's Race For Life last year with Ella and Hollie

when she found a lump while in the shower.

"My mum lost her mother and two sisters to breast cancer, so I made an appointment to see my doctor straight away. He ordered an ultrasound and a biopsy.

"I hoped it was just a cyst, but deep down I suspected the worst. I had many sleepless nights that week wondering if I was going to die. When the doctor told me it was cancer, I broke down in tears.

"At first, I felt I couldn't tell my children Hollie, 12, Ella, 10 and Callum, seven. But a few days later, I told the girls. Hollie went very quiet while Ella ran away and hid under her bed. Callum was too young to understand.

"I'd met a new man, Brian, who's 60 and owns his own flooring business, only three weeks earlier. I knew telling him would be hard, but he was wonderfully supportive. I said I'd understand if he left me, but thankfully, he said he wouldn't hear of it."

When tests revealed the cancer was aggressive and had already started to spread, Tara was told a mastectomy was her best chance of survival.

"I wasn't worried about feeling less feminine or sexy. When you know you've got something that could kill you inside your body, you just want it out. I'd rather lose a breast than risk not seeing my children grow up," she says.

Four days later, Tara had her breast removed, along with 12 lymph nodes.

"I was terrified about looking at myself afterwards," she says. "But when the nurse removed the bandage, my breast was just flat and smooth. I felt surprisingly relieved."

Three weeks after the operation, Tara started chemotherapy.



**'THE FINAL RESULTS WERE AMAZING'**

PHOTOGRAPH BY LORNA BOURCHIER FOR NEWS

"On New Year's Day, I woke up to find hair all over my pillow. After everything I'd been through, this upset me the most. It was difficult for the children too," she says.

After six months of chemotherapy, Tara then faced a course of radiotherapy.

"It didn't make me feel as ill as the chemo, but the last few sessions burned my skin so badly where the radiotherapy had targeted the tumours that I didn't think it would heal."

Meanwhile, Tara's doctors told her she could start thinking about reconstruction.

"Brian was brilliant — he told me he loved me just as I was, but I wanted the reconstruction for me."

Mr Nduka agreed to perform the DIEP surgery, but there was one problem — Tara's stomach wasn't big enough.

"He told me: 'You need to put on some weight so there's more fat and tissue to use. Go and eat some doughnuts.'"

"That might sound like every woman's dream but it was easier said than done.

"My stomach has always been flat and because I'd been taking medication that makes you prone to weight gain, I'd been cautious about what I'd been eating," she says.

But Tara, who is a dress size 12-14, managed to gain 5lb and in February 2007 she was admitted to The Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead, for the 10-hour operation.

"The result was amazing. Even the nurses told me it was one of the best reconstructions they'd seen," says Tara.

Earlier this year, she returned to have a nipple created for her new breast.

"The surgeon cut a piece of my skin on the breast and twisted it to form a nipple," Tara says. "It looked just like the real thing."

"A few weeks later, the skin around the nipple was tattooed to make it look more realistic.

"The surgery was a huge confidence boost. I have a long scar where the surgeon took flesh from my stomach and I've lost a lot of the feeling in my breast — but it's a small price to pay.

"The doctors say if you can go five years without the cancer returning you have more hope of staying clear. Next October it will be five years since I was diagnosed and I'm hoping for good news. But for now, I'm living one day at a time."

● The Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead, West Sussex, has produced a free DVD about breast reconstruction options. Visit [Breastreconstructionforlife.org.uk](http://Breastreconstructionforlife.org.uk).

**Have you fought back from illness?**  
Tell us at [Fabulousmag.co.uk](http://Fabulousmag.co.uk)