

## Payout and more operations for mother whose treatment went wrong



Happy new ear: Tania is having reconstructive surgery

# I had surgery to pin back my ears. Then one fell off

HAVING big protruding ears is a genetic fact of life in Tania Shirt's family.

It meant years of bullying at school, where she was called Dumbo and Big Ears. Later, she tried to boost her confidence by seeking psychiatric help.

Eventually, like her mother, aunt and cousin, she resorted to cosmetic surgery to cure her most distinctive and unflattering feature.

But the procedure to pin back her ears went disastrously wrong – five weeks later, most of her left ear fell off.

Miss Shirt, a 34-year-old divorcee, was drying her hair one New Year's Eve before going out to the pub when the ear came away in her hand.

'It was a real shock,' she said. 'I had £5 in my pocket and I had to decide whether to go to hospital or go to the pub. In the end I went to the pub.'

She believes bandages holding her ears back after the operation had been too tight and blood circulation could have been cut off.

She said the outside rim of her ear had gone black and a section of it

By **Chris Brooke**

died. In the five years since, Miss Shirt, a care home assistant from Barnsley, has had four operations to rebuild her ear.

Further surgery to complete the reconstruction is expected this year.

She has received several thousand pounds compensation after suing the private hospital which carried out the original, NHS-funded operation. The hospital has not been identified because of an on-going legal dispute.

Her experience will act as a warn-

### 'Just one of those things'

ing to others considering 'routine' cosmetic surgery, but despite her problems Miss Shirt has no regrets.

'My problem was a one-off, a one-in-a-million chance,' she said. 'There's always a chance things can go wrong with simple operations and I put it down to just one of those things.'

Sticky-out ears have been in the

family for generations and are known by them as 'Pynygongles' – the name of her big-eared grandfather's home in North Wales.

Miss Shirt said she would wear her hair long to cover her ears and would not go out in the rain or go swimming in case they were revealed. Her children Danny, 13, and Sadie-Anne, 11, also have them and must eventually decide whether to have surgery.

The reconstructive surgery has been carried out by international expert David Gault, who is based at the Great Ormond Street and Mount Vernon hospitals in London.

He took cartilage from her ribs to create an ear-like structure to match her right ear. He inserted it into a 'pocket' of skin that had been created next to the ear.

Blood supply has been established and the new section of ear will soon be freed from her head to make it look normal.

Around 5 per cent of the population have ears that stick out more than 40 degrees from their head, often leading to embarrassment.

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