

# Do I have to take all these drugs?



**Amanda tries to get to grips with IVF and is left daunted**



With Paul, my parents and sister



Cuddling my niece Matilda

Will my box of tricks work?

**The story so far**

Unable to have a baby naturally, Amanda and her hubby Paul decide on IVF. But then Paul is diagnosed with cancer. Suddenly the couple are fighting a far bigger battle — just to keep him alive. Now, with Paul having been given the all-clear, the two of them restart the IVF process. But, as Amanda soon realises, things are far from simple... (To read last week's story in full, go to our website [www.thatslife.co.uk](http://www.thatslife.co.uk).)

The contents of my fridge are worth over one grand. Heaven forbid we ever have a power cut! But what's even more astonishing is that doesn't even include the food. Instead, it's boxes and bottles of fertility drugs. This is just part of the great adventure you involve yourself in when you embark upon IVF — your fridge suddenly becomes a mini-pharmacy. The private fertility hospital where I'm a patient sent me the prescription. It was unbelievably long, and listed drugs I'd never heard of before. There were so many, I had to send the prescription to a pharmaceutical company in West Yorkshire — to my surprise,

the drugs aren't supplied by the hospital itself. Then the company phoned, asking me to pay an outlandish amount of money for my order — £1,180.42, to be precise! But, of course, I had no choice except to pay up. I needed all those items if I was ever going to have a baby. Thank goodness for my dad, who's not only extremely kind and has already transferred the £5,000 for the IVF treatment into our account, but who also revels in the thought of being a grandad again. He has two grandchildren from my sister Jane, 43, and

dotes on them both. A typical no-nonsense, down-to-earth Northerner, Dad turns into a big softie when little Ivor, three, and Matilda, 16 months, are around. 'Sweetheart, I know you'll make a fantastic mother,' he's touchingly told me on several occasions, and I know he really wants me to add to the family gene pool. And I'm desperate to as well. A few days after paying, the drugs arrive — by courier van. It's

**'I'm desperate to add to the family gene pool'**

as if I've just ordered a new set of garden furniture. Doesn't this cargo need to be transported in an ambulance-type vehicle? Paul, 44, and I nervously slice through the packaging tape and gingerly peer inside as if we're opening Pandora's box. And, like Pandora's box, there are surprises in there. I already knew about the drugs I'll have to sniff. Plus the ones Paul will have to inject (or rather stab) into my leg. But I hadn't realised I'd also be dealing with pessaries. And, horror of horrors, suppositories! Again, I realise I'm still far from the top of the IVF learning curve. I carefully place the drugs in the fridge as directed. But now, every time I open the door, there's no escaping what I'm

about to put myself through. I look at all the leaflets that accompany the drugs and feel overwhelmed by information. Later that day, I sit down and try to educate myself. I'm very nervous about the nasal spray Synarel, which starts the IVF process because it plunges your body into the menopause. The leaflet explains it in a more scientific way: *The drug temporarily switches off the hormonal messages from the brain to the ovaries, thus preventing ovulation.* Then the drug I'll be injecting later in the IVF cycle will do just the opposite, restarting my reproductive system and boosting egg production ready for fertilisation. 'So,' Paul muses, 'it's like slamming the brakes on a car, then flooring the accelerator.' You'd never guess I'd married a mechanic, would you? 'I don't mind the thought of racing through the gears,' I say. 'But it's the emergency braking I'm not looking forward to!' Even more so when I read all the 'menopausal' side-effects. Night sweats. Acne. (I've only just started enjoying a nice complexion at the age of 40!) Headaches. Decreased breast size. Change in sex drive. Vaginal dryness. Muscle pains. Tiredness. Lack of concentration. And worst of all, mood swings. I laugh slightly hysterically at what I read next. *These symptoms are positive signs, as they suggest that the drugs are working.* Well, that's OK, then! When I mention my anxieties to Paul, rather than giving me a reassuring hug, and telling me he'll still love me even if I do turn into a hormonal monster, he grimaces and mutters something along the lines of: 'I wonder if we should get your

**'My body will be plunged into the menopause'**

mum down to stay for a while.' Along with my big stash of drugs, I've also been sent a timetable outlining a typical IVF treatment cycle. Day One was the first day of my period, and I'll have to start sniffing on Day 21 — which is just a fortnight away now. Suddenly the whole prospect of what I'm about to do is so daunting, I decide to fortify myself first. I splash out on a visit to the hairdresser's and some new clothes. Then, on impulse, I book us a last-minute weekend in Budapest, as I know once the IVF starts for real, we'll have to be pretty much home-based and near the hospital. Just before we leave, Paul has his regular cancer check-up at the hospital's head and neck clinic. He's taken to calling them 'death mornings', as they're always before midday and the atmosphere is like a morgue. At his last appointment, we'd

both been ecstatic when a scan hadn't detected a single cancerous cell in any part of his body. Even his surgeon, the revered Mr Bond (yes, that really is his name) had seemed optimistic for the first time since Paul's cancer diagnosis a year ago. 'Just be positive and enjoy your lives,' he'd said. Which was exactly how we felt — I've always believed in fighting this horrible disease with happiness and love. Now, Paul heads off for his appointment on his own. But returning, he looks deflated. 'Mr Bond was away — and his replacement matter-of-factly commented that scans aren't always 100 per cent correct,' Paul said, slightly annoyed. Yet I'm fuming — what did this doctor think he was



Just some of my prescription items

My fridge is a mini-pharmacy

saying? His words seem so insensitive. But it's also another reminder of just how much I need this IVF to be a success. I realise none of us knows what the future holds. But Paul's battle against cancer has left me with a deep-seated need to have his child. So that if, God forbid, anything bad were to happen to him, I'd still have a part of him with me. During these past weeks, my mum, sister and friend Caroline,



I long to have Paul's baby

41, have all become increasingly excited about my IVF treatment, but it's clear no one has a clue what it's really all about. And when I try to explain to them how it works, I suddenly realise I don't have much of an idea either! 'Just be aware that there's no guarantee I'll have a baby at the end of this,' I keep reminding everyone. I'm starting to sound like all the IVF doctors and nurses who've repeatedly drummed into Paul and me that our chances of having a baby are not just slim, but pretty much anorexic — a mere 17 per cent. So, six days before the IVF starts for real, as we pack for our weekend away, I feel butterflies stirring inside. 'Out of sight, out of mind,' I tell myself as I stash the big delivery box away. Yet even as we stroll hand in hand through the beautiful old streets of Budapest, it's impossible to forget the refrigerator full of medication waiting for us upon our return. That's when the real journey will begin.

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**Next week...**  
Amanda's IVF treatment begins at last — but nasal sprays and injections with giant syringes are soon the least of her worries.