

COURAGE, WOMAN!

Just as Amanda reaches the next crucial stage of IVF, she starts to lose her bottle...

The story so far

Unable to have a baby naturally, writer 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 couple have restarted the IVF process. This week, Amanda has to overcome her needle phobia in order to inject herself with the next load of IVF drugs. (To read last week's story in full, go to www.thatslife.co.uk.)

Oh, my God! I start the injections tonight! I've just been told by the clinic I'm finally ready to get onto the next rung of the IVF ladder.

Yes, I'm relieved I'm through the awful sniffing stage. I'd been using a nasal spray called Synarel which triggered a temporary menopause, making me 'down-regulate' in IVF speak.

Yet it's a double-edged sword. Joy on one side, dread on the other. You see, I've always kept quiet about my needle phobia. I'm fine about a medical person sticking a needle into me, although I never look. *But doing it myself?*

I pad downstairs to Paul, who's working in the garage, and tell him the 'good' news.

'Yeh! You've down-regulated!' he says, kissing me.

I smile inwardly at the ease with which he now speaks the IVF lingo. Like a real pro.

'So, are you OK to inject me then?' I ask, straight-faced.

'Oh...' he says, suddenly ashen. 'I honestly think you're better doing it yourself...'

I enjoy winding him up. 'But you *have* to!' I insist.

'No, I can't! I might hurt you,' he stutters, not sure if I'm pulling his leg or not.

It's great fun — but if he'd said: 'Yes, I'll do it!', I don't think I'd let him.

To say he doesn't know his own strength is an understatement. When

Paul occasionally gives me a foot massage, I nearly end up with at least one broken bone!

I get out the step-by-step poster of instructions. It's idiot-proof, but my rising sense of panic stops me from understanding it. I ring my mum. 'I've got to do the first injection tonight!' I say, before she's even had time to say hello.

I pour out all my worries — whether I'll be able to do it...my needle phobia...that I'm scared...

When I run out of steam, she says simply: 'Of course you can do it. You're tough as old boots!'

It's exactly what I need to hear. I try to concentrate on work for the next few hours, but find myself

clock-watching constantly.

I have to inject once a day, in the evening. The drug is called Gonad-F, which will stimulate my ovaries to produce (hopefully) lots of eggs.

At 6.45pm, I go to the fridge-cum-pharmacy, where my IVF drugs are stored. At first, they were all neatly stacked on their own special shelf, treated like gold dust. (They probably are worth their weight in gold.) But after a couple of months, attitudes change.

Today, there's a pack of bacon balanced on top of one box of drugs, and a bottle of ketchup squashed against another.

When Paul emerges from the garage, we set up the injecting gear. I'm fumbling around, still overwhelmed by the instructions.

Thankfully, Paul takes over. He gets the state-of-the-art injection pen out of its packaging, takes the needle and screws it onto the end.

He then turns the dial to 300iu — the amount I've been told to inject — and takes off the protective cap, revealing a glistening steel needle.

I quickly rub a sterile wipe over part of my stomach. I take the needle in one hand, grab a roll of fat from my stomach with the



Needles are my biggest fear



Mum's kept me calm when I've panicked

other. Then I take a big, deep breath and — *jab!*

There's a sting as I push the top of the 'pen' down. It clicks as it empties the correct dosage into my body. From the corner of my eye, I see Paul's hand go to his face as he walks out of the kitchen.

I withdraw the needle and breathe a sigh of relief. Paul returns — ashen again — and says: 'Well done!'

Then he gently takes away the syringe, which I'm still gripping tightly, and pops the needle into the 'sharps bin' we've been given. *I've done it!*

Rerunning the whole episode in my head later, I realise that sticking a needle into yourself doesn't hurt at all! It's the fear of doing it which is the biggest hurdle by far.

I now have to do this every night for a week. Then we'll go to the fertility clinic to see if, this time, my body's doing what it's supposed to.

There's a risk my ovaries may not be stimulated enough, in which case my IVF journey will abruptly come to a halt.

More worryingly, there is a chance they'll be *over-stimulated*, which could lead to hospitalisation — or even death.

But I won't think about that. If all goes well, I'm not far from the finish line. And hopefully nearer to our dream of having a child.

AMANDA REVELL WALTON, 40, HIGHWORTH, WILTSHIRE

NEXT WEEK: How will Amanda's body react to the powerful new drugs she's taking?



I teased Paul about the injections