American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

A proactive approach to workplace health

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For more than 22 years, Candy Hatch's office has been an airplane. "I'm a mechanic on the docks," she said. That's simplifying it a little. She's an American Airlines Aviation Maintenance Technician (AMT) at Tech Ops – Tulsa, assigned to avionics. Every day, she walks and crawls over every inch of an aircraft, inspecting delicate electronics and working to ensure the aircraft is safe for flight. "Where you rest your feet, that's my workspace," she said. "Yeah, it's some tight spaces."

The kind of mobility needed to perform Candy's everyday functions takes a conscious effort to develop and maintain strength, balance and flexibility. Ten years ago, those topics might not have been something that she and her fellow AMTs talked about. But today, team members know that staying proactive about health and physical well-being is important both at work and at home.

In 2013, American began offering a resource to help. Work-Fit is an independent program that works to advance safe physical work practices. Licensed athletic trainers teach team members everything from proper lifting techniques to healthy diet options. They help team members understand the importance of balance, strength training and stretching and how that affects their health and fatigue levels and helps them avoid injury. To simplify, team members have access to personal trainers.

Candy said that what her athletic trainer, Erin Ging, teaches her makes sense and she sees the benefits.

> "She's taught me the right quantity of reps and sets, how much to do without hurting myself. She tells me if I'm doing it wrong and shows me the difference in how women and men should lift. [The information] helps me better understand what I should do, how much I should do and how frequently I should do it."
> — Candy Hatch, Aviation Maintenance Technician, Tech Ops – Tulsa

Laura Sabatino, Work-Fit Program Manager in Charlotte, North Carolina, said that team members come in for a variety of reasons. Some may have an injury that they are trying to overcome or heal; others are looking for help in creating a home exercise program.

“We personalize our lifting, exercise and weight-loss advice based on the person and the need,” she said. “We teach them that there is no one way to do things — it’s based on the person and their abilities or limitations. Sometimes a team member is just trying to start making healthy changes so we will help them with small changes at first so they are successful and not overwhelmed.”

Plant Maintenance Mechanic Brad Baker found Work-Fit by accident. He helped remodel the facilities where the program is based out of at Tech Ops – Tulsa. Six months later, he pulled a back muscle and didn’t hesitate making a visit to Work-Fit.

> “It was a knot located right on a muscle, so every movement was painful. They knew immediately when they saw it poking out of my shoulder. They worked on me every day — stretching, massaging, heat and cold therapy. It took a couple of weeks.”
> — Brad Baker, Plant Maintenance Mechanic, Tech Ops – Tulsa

Now he visits the small gym regularly to use the treadmill or lift weights as part of his already-existing regimen.

For team member who put off seeking treatment for a muscle strain, a workplace location gives them easy access to help. “I was in so much pain the first day I saw them — I didn’t think I could make it through the shift that day,” Fleet Service Crew Chief Glenn Kukis said. “I was working a 16-hour shift and was able to finish the whole day after seeing them.” Understanding how important it was for him to continue pain-free, he began making the visits part of his routine in Chicago. The trainers even assessed his workstation to make sure his environment wasn’t adding to his injury. “As I continued to use them, the injury continued to improve. They have visited me at my job site, adjusted my chair and followed up with me to keep me going and make sure I am still good. It has been a huge help.”

Laura has witnessed the different benefits that Work-Fit has helped facilitate. “Following treatment, team members are surprised they could get better after a few visits. On a weekly basis, I have team members stop me throughout the operation to tell me about their weight loss or that they've been able to come off medications due to their healthier lifestyle.”

Whether the job is lifting bags onto an aircraft or standing for an extended period of time to assist customers, the program continues to be a popular resource for all workgroups. In the fourth quarter of 2017, more than 4,000

team members took advantage of Work-Fit. Currently, American offers the resource at five locations: Charlotte, North Carolina; Chicago; Dallas/Fort Worth; Miami; and Tulsa, Oklahoma.