

HEY, HALF PINT

HEROES!

Ask a Pilot!

**Hey Half Pint Heroes! Do you love to fly? WE DO!
We sat down with Pilot Mark Schwartz and asked him your
top questions about flying an airplane.
Read his answers before your next flight!**

What is your job like?

I fly 737s, which is the most popular type of airplane out there, and I usually fly between three and five days a week. The average pilot flies somewhere between 70-80 hours a month.

Most people think pilots have set routes, or fly to and from the same destinations every week, but we don't! As most airlines are worldwide organizations, with thousands of flights a day, there are very few pilots who fly a set route. Instead, there is a scheduling department that makes all kinds of trips for us, and I fly all over the United States.

What are a few cool things about your job?

There are so many cool things about my job, but my favorite is when kids come up and say hi during the boarding process! (And moms and dads, yes, this is allowed, as long as we aren't delayed or super busy.)

The other cool thing is getting to see the sun on a cloudy day because we usually fly above the clouds.

Also, I get to travel around the world for free!

When did you know you wanted to be a pilot?

Lots of people want to be pilots from a very young age, but it wasn't my dream until the end of college. I always thought pilots were cool, but I am very scared of heights and so I didn't think I could do it. But I faced my fears, and I am so glad because I love flying airplanes.

What are some of your favorite parts of the airplanes you fly?

My favorite feature of the airplane is the flight management system. It's a computer that I input our flight plan into, and then it tells the autopilot where we want to go. Without it, my job would be much harder.

What do an airplane's wings do?

Wings are a special shape that make what is called "lift." The air over the top of the wing goes a little faster than the air below it, which causes the wing to get sucked up, letting us fly!

Flaps are a part of a wing, and you might see them lower from the wing during takeoff and landing. We use flaps to help us fly slowly by increasing lift. But when you make lift, you also make what's called "drag." That slows you down, so when we are in cruise flight and we want to be as fast as possible, we put the flaps up.

When do pilots eat when they are on the job?

At my airline we get fed crew meals, which can be good or bad. Sometimes they are like first class meals, with ice cream sundaes! Other times they are just a cold piece of chicken. You never know, so sometimes we bring our own meals. And since we spend so much time in airports, we know where to find all of the best airport food! One of my favorite meals is a burger and fries from [Five Guys](#) in Washington Reagan's International Airport. They also have shakes!

What are the most important things kids should remember on the airplane?

The number one thing to remember is to have fun! There is no other way to get to the other side of the country or the world in just a few hours!

Also, listen to your parents or the guardian you are traveling with, as well as our awesome flight attendants. Airplanes usually have over a hundred people in a little space, something you're probably not used to! So be sure to have your listening ears on and be on your best behavior.

Turbulence can be a little scary. What should I remember if the ride gets a little bouncy?

When I am scared, I find that tightening my seat belt as tight as I can really helps. If your seatbelt is loose, you might bounce around during turbulence, takeoffs and landings. You don't need to be afraid of turbulence though. Even dropping a few feet (which can feel super scary) at 31,000 feet in the air is no big deal. Think about it: You are still 30,998 feet above the ground! Your airplane has been tested to withstand very intense forces, so even the worst turbulence is no big deal.

What are some of the coolest places you've flown?

The coolest places I've been able to fly into are Washington, D.C.'s Reagan National Airport and New York City's LaGuardia Airport. Both of them are right by cities that I love and it's super cool to get to see them from above.

What is the difference between first class and economy class?

First class and economy differences can really vary, but usually the fare (the cost of a ticket) for first class is much higher than that of economy. If you're flying domestically, or within the same country, in the United States or Europe, first class means getting a bigger seat and a meal. If you're going over an ocean, then first class seats can sometimes recline into a bed. Just remember, no matter if you're in first class or the main cabin, you're going to have fun and get where you're going just as safely.

Is there anything else about your job that we should know?

One thing that kids should know about pilots is how long and hard you have to work to become a pilot in the United States. There is a law requiring practicing for 1,500 flight hours to become a pilot. To understand what that means, think about this: It took me almost a decade, or ten years, of flying full time in the military to get that much experience!

In other words, it takes as much time and experience to be an airline pilot as it does to become a doctor, so you are in very good hands.

When you were a kid, what were some of your favorite places to go on vacation?

When I was a kid I loved going to Washington, D.C. and visiting all of the museums. I loved it so much I went to college there—and I still love it today!

