

The Lunch Break Report: Inside the Modern Workday's Most Endangered Break

A new national survey of 1,047 U.S. knowledge workers examines how people really treat the lunch break today. From generational, gender, and geographic differences to the competing pressures of workload and workplace culture, the findings reveal whether workers truly step away at midday or work straight through - and whether AI tools offer hope to take back lunch.

Conducted by Morning Consult on behalf of Zoom · Feb 17 - Mar 3, 2026

THE PROBLEM

Knowledge Workers Are Losing Their Lunch



THE CULTURE PROBLEM

58% Say feeling pressured to be available to colleagues during lunch hours is a challenge to taking a break

35% Boss doesn't take lunch | **37%** Team doesn't take lunch

35% Not encouraged org-wide

63% Say heavy workload is a challenge to taking a break

54% Meetings scheduled during lunch hour

AUDIENCE DEEP DIVE: Where You Work Changes Habits

% doing this at least once per week

BEHAVIOR	IN-PERSON	REMOTE
Eat lunch while working at desk	75%	70%
Eat lunch during a meeting	44%	35%
Skip lunch altogether	31%	41%

AUDIENCE DEEP DIVE: Millennials Are Losing Lunch the Most

% doing this at least once per week

BEHAVIOR	GEN Z	MILLENNIAL	GEN X
Eat lunch while working at desk	70%	81%	74%
Grab a very short lunch (\$15 min)	58%	66%	56%
Snack instead of a full meal	45%	61%	54%
Skip lunch altogether	43%	37%	31%
Use lunch for something other than eating	63%	70%	52%

AUDIENCE DEEP DIVE: Parents Are Squeezing Lunch the Hardest

GRAB A SHORT LUNCH (\$15 MIN)

71% vs **48%**
Parents vs Non-Parents

USE LUNCH FOR OTHER TASKS

70% vs **48%**
Parents vs Non-Parents

CAMERA CULTURE

Eating on Screen? Most Would Rather Go Hungry

72% would rather skip lunch entirely than eat on camera

MOST UNCOMFORTABLE EATING ON CAMERA WITH

48% External Partners | **47%** Clients

AUDIENCE DEEP DIVE: Who's Comfortable Eating on Camera?

BY GENDER

57% Men comfortable | **40%** Women comfortable

BY GENERATION — % COMFORTABLE EATING ON CAMERA WITH CLIENTS

65% Gen Z | **60%** Millennial | **38%** Gen X

The Video Lunch Hall of Shame

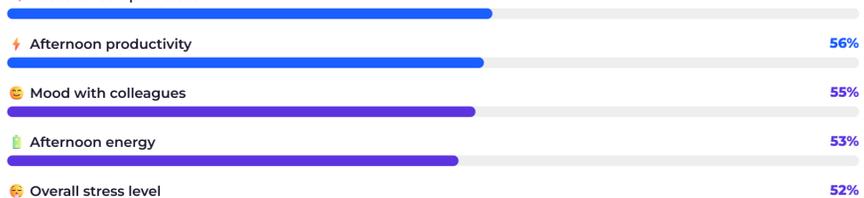
Awkward moments knowledge workers have experienced while eating during video meetings



THE BENEFITS

Real Breaks Deliver Real Results

% WHO SAY A 30-MIN LUNCH BREAK IMPROVES EACH OF THE FOLLOWING



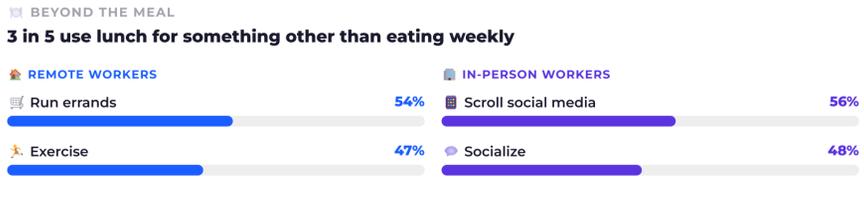
AUDIENCE DEEP DIVE: In-Person Workers Feel It More

% reporting improvement after taking a real lunch break

BENEFIT	IN-PERSON	REMOTE
Productivity for the rest of the day	58%	45%
Ability to focus on complex tasks	57%	47%
Mood when interacting with colleagues	56%	46%
Overall energy in the afternoon	56%	44%
Overall stress level	53%	43%

BEYOND THE MEAL

3 in 5 use lunch for something other than eating weekly



THE SOLUTION

AI Is the Key to Taking Back Lunch

AI users are saving serious time — and want to spend it on lunch

Among knowledge workers who already use AI tools at work



AUDIENCE DEEP DIVE: Younger Workers Are Leading the AI Charge



Knowledge workers see AI tools as a pathway to reclaiming lunch and restoring work-life balance

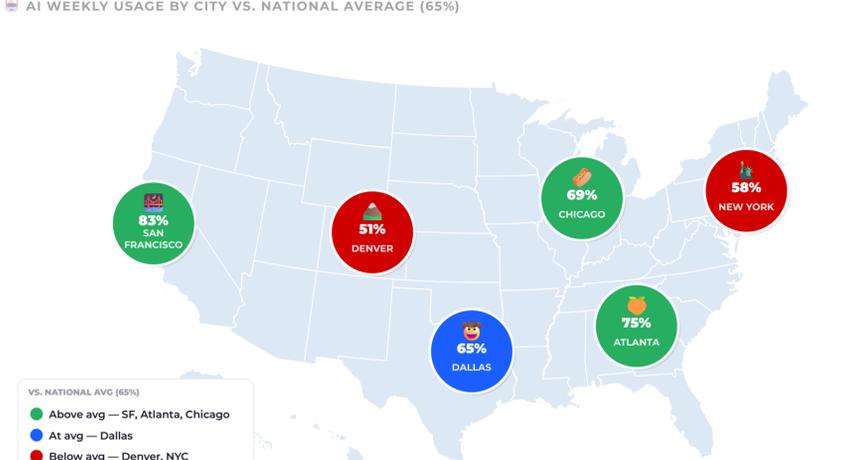


DIGGING DEEPER

How Major Cities Stack Up

US NATIONAL AVERAGE: Use AI tools at least once per week for work **65%**

AI WEEKLY USAGE BY CITY VS. NATIONAL AVERAGE (65%)



VS. NATIONAL AVG (65%)
 ● Above avg — SF, Atlanta, Chicago
 ● At avg — Dallas
 ● Below avg — Denver, NYC

NEW YORK CITY: LEAVING THE DESK, BUT STILL SKIPPING LUNCH
 43% take a dedicated lunch break away from their workspace at least 3 days/week (vs. 36% nationally)
 39% skip lunch at least once a week
 52% say they don't have a convenient or convenient place to eat away from their workspace (vs. 46% nationally)
 More likely to use their lunch break to run errands 56%, socialize 53%, or exercise 44% than the US overall

CHICAGO: THE DESK-EATING CAPITAL
 61% of knowledge workers eat lunch while working at least 3 days/week (vs. 44% nationally)

DALLAS: BOOKED DURING LUNCH
 62% say meetings scheduled over lunch are a challenge to taking a break (vs. 54% nationally)
 55% feel uncomfortable eating on camera with clients or customers (vs. 47% nationally)

DENVER: LUNCH BREAK CULTURE IN CRISIS
 51% skip lunch three or more days per week — more than triple the national rate of 15%
 Meetings scheduled over the lunch hour 75% and pressure to stay online 72% are cited as the biggest barriers (vs. 54% and 58% nationally)
 Knowledge workers report that their teams 73% and bosses 49% do not typically take lunch breaks (vs. 37% and 35% nationally)

ATLANTA: FACING CAMERA CULTURE PRESSURE
 81% would rather skip lunch altogether than eat on camera during a video meeting (vs. 72% nationally)
 38% have felt the need to apologize for eating on camera during work calls (vs. 26% nationally)

SAN FRANCISCO: AI LEADERS READY TO TAKE BACK LUNCH
 83% use AI tools at least once a week for work (vs. 65% nationally)
 61% say they're very likely to use time saved by AI tools for a dedicated lunch break (vs. 36% nationally)
 80% are likely to use AI tools to skip lunchtime meetings and take a break instead (vs. 66% nationally)

Methodology: This survey was conducted by Morning Consult on behalf of Zoom between February 17 - March 3, 2026 among a national sample of 1,047 U.S. knowledge workers. Oversamples were also collected of 276 NYC knowledge workers, 166 San Francisco knowledge workers, 224 Chicago knowledge workers, 217 Dallas knowledge workers, 202 Atlanta knowledge workers, and 105 Denver knowledge workers. The interviews were conducted online. Results from national data have a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points, and results from oversample data have margins of error of +/- 6-10 percentage points.