

The Lunch Report

1.1



1.2

1.3



Why lunch in the workplace is so much more than just a meal



According to ezCater's latest research, lunch breaks are essential for a sharper mind and a happier, more productive workforce. Yet, employees are feeling both the financial squeeze and the pressure to power through the busy workday.

- ➔ More workers are skipping lunch at least once per week, with Gen Z and millennials hit the hardest.
- ➔ Rising personal food costs — both groceries and eating out — are forcing workers to change their lunch habits: either spend more or seek cheaper options.
- ➔ Employer-provided meals are high-value perks today, so much so that 75% of today's hybrid employees say they would work onsite more often if their employer provided lunch.

In this year's report, we share insights into why workers are skipping their lunch breaks, the impact "hanger" has on team dynamics and productivity, the struggle of eating and meeting at the same time, and the unique challenges younger generations face in taking well-deserved breaks. We also explore the strategic value of employer-provided food — and identify quick wins for your workplace based on the data.

Report highlights

1 Lunch breaks work wonders — if they're taken

94% of employees say a lunch break boosts their performance, yet 51% of them skip lunch altogether at least once a week and 33% skip it twice a week or more.



2 Gen Z's love of lunch comes with a side of guilt

While Gen Z is most likely to call lunch their favorite part of the workday, they're also **110% more likely** than older colleagues to think their boss will frown on them taking a break.

4 Hanger is hijacking workplace productivity

Hanger, the irritability that results when hunger and anger team up, does more than rumble stomachs — it frays tempers and attention. **84% of employees** experience “hanger” on the job, and over half say they're less focused and more irritable as a result.

5 Lunch breaks are being replaced by the “working lunch”

63% of workers now eat their midday meals during in-person meetings, with nearly one-third doing so every week.



3 Inflation is rewriting the lunch menu

74% of workers say inflation has impacted how they eat midday meals — and where they're getting them from.



The power of lunch vs. the pressure to skip

01

Lunch isn't just about curbing hunger, it's a proven performance booster. New ezCater data reveals that taking a lunch break is directly linked to sharper focus, stronger engagement, and less burnout — benefits no team can afford to skip.

The only problem? **They're missing it.**

Heavy workloads are a major factor behind missed lunch breaks. When deadlines pile up and the pace intensifies, employees often choose to power through rather than step away for a midday meal.



The midday meal that's off the table for many...


51% of workers **skip** lunch altogether at least once per week
(compared to 49% last year)




Only **35%** of employees take a lunch break away from their desk every day

...despite a full plate of benefits

The proof is in the pudding: employees say a midday meal is the perfect recipe for a clearer mind, better mood, reduced burnout, and a sizable productivity boost. In fact, 85% of employees say that their afternoon productivity improves after having lunch (a 9% increase compared to last year).

94% 
say that a lunch break improves their performance

52% 
have more mental clarity after taking a lunch break

50% 
say a lunch break makes them happier

43% 
feel less burned out after taking a lunch break



75%
of hybrid employees say they would work onsite more often if their employer provided lunch

Lunch anticipation is up — and so are employee moods

82%

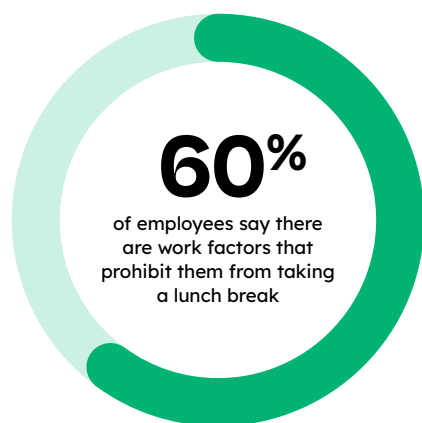
of workers say they look forward to lunch during their workday (a 12% increase compared to last year)



76% of workers say the thought of lunch positively affects their mood in the morning

(up 19% from last year)

Lunch increases productivity. So why are employees skipping it?



26% avoid breaks to finish their workday sooner

23% don't have enough time in their workday to complete their work

20% have too many meetings during the lunch hour

And workers' wallets are feeling the strain

Between groceries and eating out, employees now spend \$108.68 a week on work lunches. That's more than a \$20 spike from last year's \$88.41 out-of-pocket costs.

SPENDING PER WEEK

2024

\$88.41

2025

\$108.68



\$20

spike compared to last year

The “hangry” truth: What skipping lunch really costs

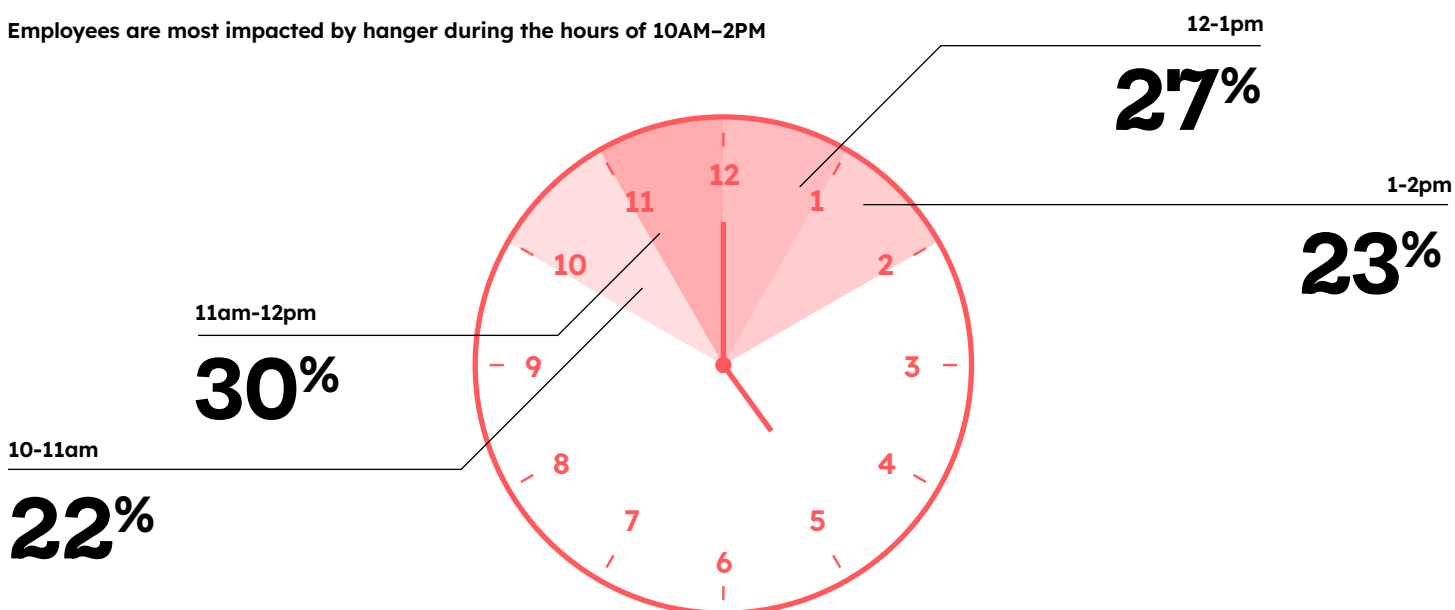
02

It's not just an empty stomach — it's "hanger." Skipping lunch silently drains focus, dampens moods, and derails productivity for employees, teams, and employers alike.

84% of workers experience hanger at work, with over half (55%) reporting it at least once per week

Workplace hanger is widespread

Employees are most impacted by hanger during the hours of 10AM-2PM



Hunger + anger = The perfect storm

When hunger and anger team up, you get hangry: that all-too-familiar sense of irritability that can plague any workplace. (Consider yourself warned.)

Youngest workers feel the hangriest

71%

of Gen Z employees say they feel hangry at work at least once per week, the most of any generation

Hanger: the **triple threat** to workers, teams, and employees

Served together, hunger and anger create a ripple effect, impacting workers, peer-to-peer dynamics, and a company's bottom line.

1

The personal toll of hanger

Being hungry at work negatively impacts 88% of employees' job performance by making them:

Less focused

52%

Less motivated

43%

More irritable

50%

Less patient

35%



2

The social strain of hanger

Hangry workers are more likely to:

Be blunt/short in communication with coworkers

38%

Avoid interacting with coworkers

25%

Gen Z and millennials were **64% more likely** to say this compared to older generations

3

The bottom line of hanger

Workers are:

Taking longer to complete tasks

 **43%**

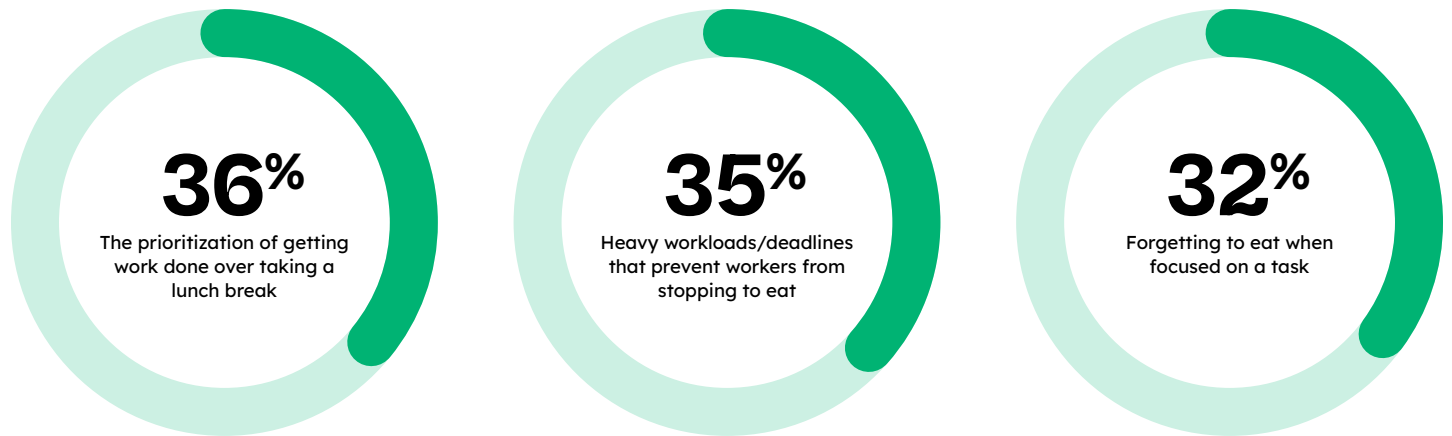
Making more mistakes

 **39%**

Producing lower quality work

 **31%**

So, what's provoking hanger in the workplace?



Lunch money: How midday meals eat into budgets

03

As food prices climb, employees are paying more for every bite. They're reconsidering routines, cutting costs, and chasing value wherever they can find it. With budgets stretched thin, food-related perks are more valuable than ever in the workplace, especially for today's youngest workers.



The price tag of a purchased lunch

On average, employees:

Purchase lunch

2.6x

per week

Spend around **\$34.82** per week buying lunch out

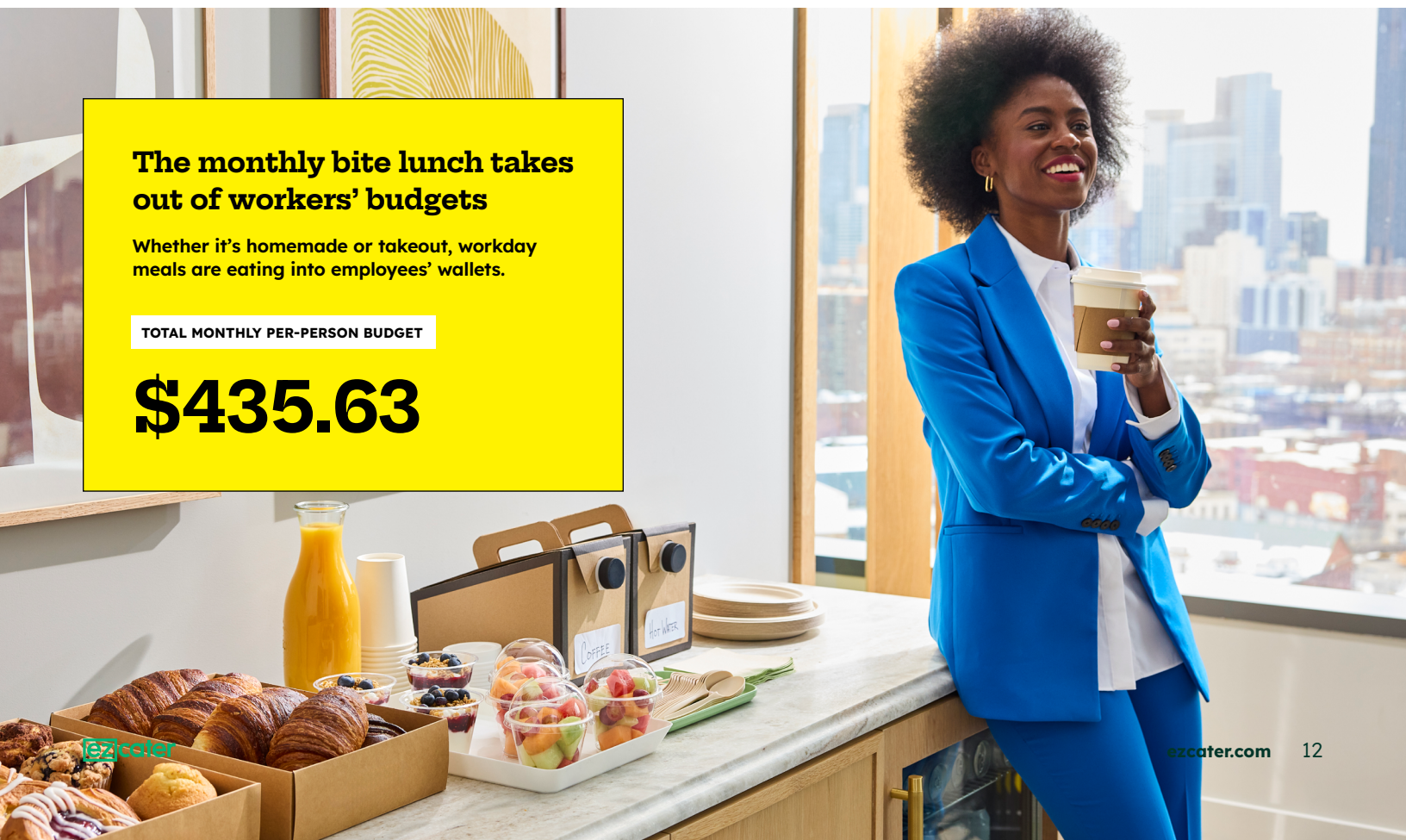
(up 26% compared to last year)

The monthly bite lunch takes out of workers' budgets

Whether it's homemade or takeout, workday meals are eating into employees' wallets.

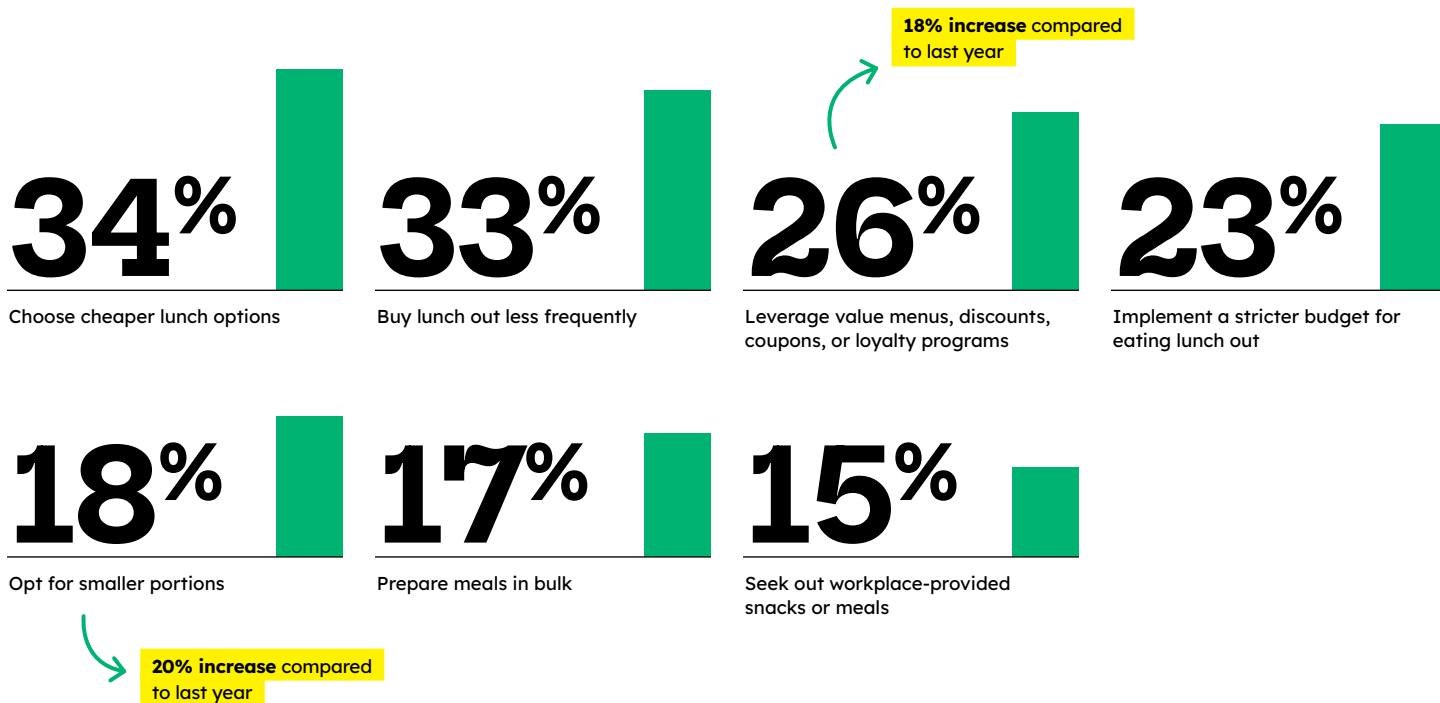
TOTAL MONTHLY PER-PERSON BUDGET

\$435.63



How rising prices reshape lunch choices

74% of workers say inflation has changed their lunch habits, making them more likely to:



Lunch costs hit younger generations hardest



Gen Z and millennials are **82% more likely** to seek out work-provided snacks or meals compared to other generations

Gen Z and millennials:



spend **54% more** on groceries for work lunches compared to older generations



spend **32% more** per meal on work lunches compared to older generations

Why takeout eats into more than just paychecks

When takeout takes up the majority of a lunch break, there's little time left to recharge or reconnect.



Over half of employees (55%) spend more than 20 minutes buying lunch off-site



Employer-provided food perks stretch budgets further

Even if employers provide food stipends once or twice a week, it can make a meaningful impact on employee budgets.

Average cost of lunch for employees when they go out:

\$13.32

Rising food prices, rising trade-offs

With budgets stretched thin, food-related perks are more valuable than ever in the workplace.

Nearly **1 in 5 workers** (17%) intentionally skip meals to save money



Lunch is booked... for a meeting

04

Packed schedules mean lunch is now part PowerPoint, part protein. In today's workplace, eating and meeting often share the same time slot. And when hunger — and hanger — lose to the calendar, the only fix is putting food on the agenda.



Lunch blocks are up, but actual eating time is down

This year, more workers are blocking their calendars to take a lunch break, but they are less likely to use that blocked time to eat.

39% 

of workers are choosing to block lunch breaks on their calendars

up 18% from last year

But, only

42% 

of those who block their calendar end up using that time to eat



Eating and meeting is the new lunch break

With calendars crammed, the lunch break is now a working lunch — complete with in-person meetings and a plate in hand.



31% say they do it once per week

Working lunches come with the expectation of food

When meetings take over the lunch break, employees have a clear message for their employers: provide food.

82%

of employees expect to be able to eat during meetings that are scheduled over their lunch break

When asked about expectations for meetings over lunchtime:

31% expect a full meal to be provided

29% expect snacks



Missing out on catered meals sparks FOMO

For today's workers, nothing stings quite like hearing about a catered lunch they weren't invited to.



66% of employees have a fear of missing out (FOMO) when another team has catered lunch for a meeting

A catered meeting is a better meeting

Food isn't just fuel. It's a secret ingredient for connection, collaboration, and appreciation.

74%

of employees agree that meetings are more productive and collaborative when food is provided

Of the workers who received lunch, 96% feel positive about it, saying it makes them feel:

- ✓ Appreciated 48%
- ✓ Motivated 40%
- ✓ Excited 40%
- ✓ Comfortable/at ease 35%
- ✓ Energized 34%

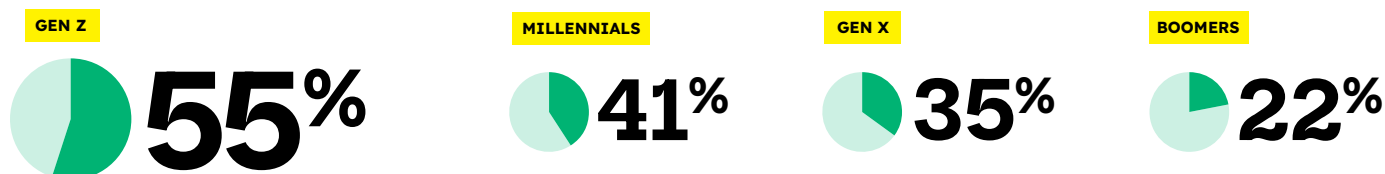
Unwrapping the lunch habits of Gen Z and millennials

05

Workers under 45 — largely Gen Z and millennials — now make up 57% of the U.S. workforce, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). While these younger workers understand the power of a lunch break, they're also 36% more likely to skip lunch at least once per week compared to older generations.

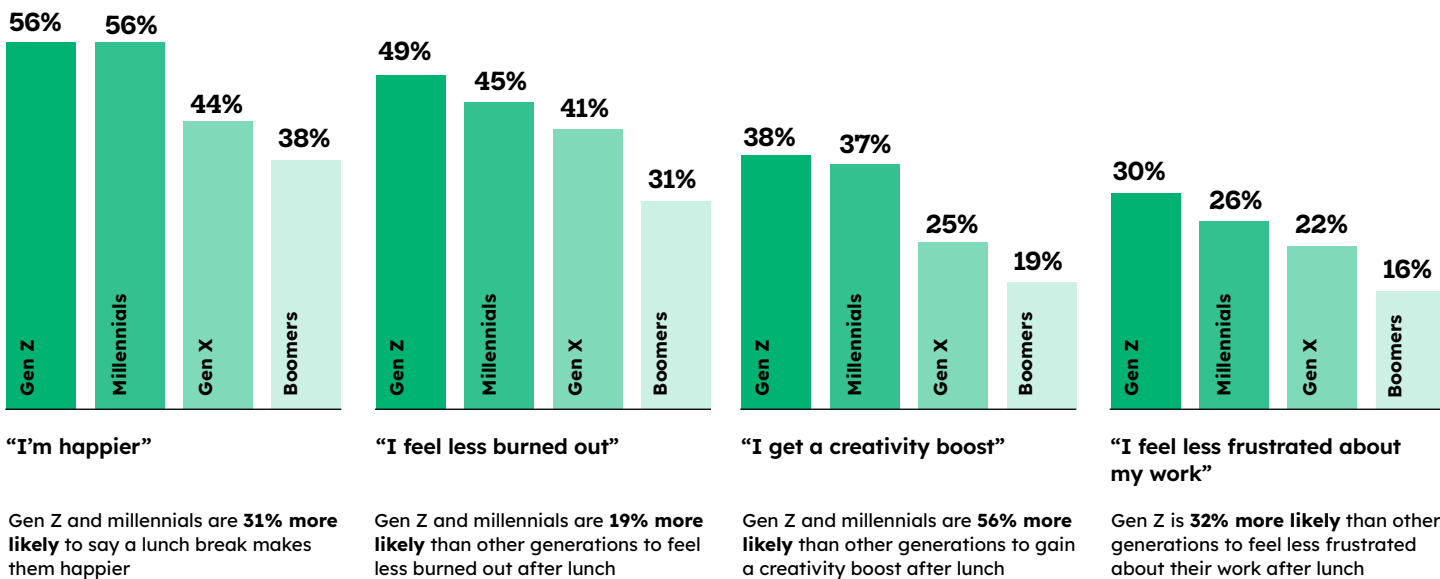


Gen Z is far more likely to rank lunch as their favorite part of the workday



The lunch break advantage is strongest for today's youngest employees

After taking a lunch break, employees are more likely to say:



But no generation worries about lunch more than Gen Z

Gen Z is

110% more likely

than older generations to say they think their employer won't look favorably on them taking a break



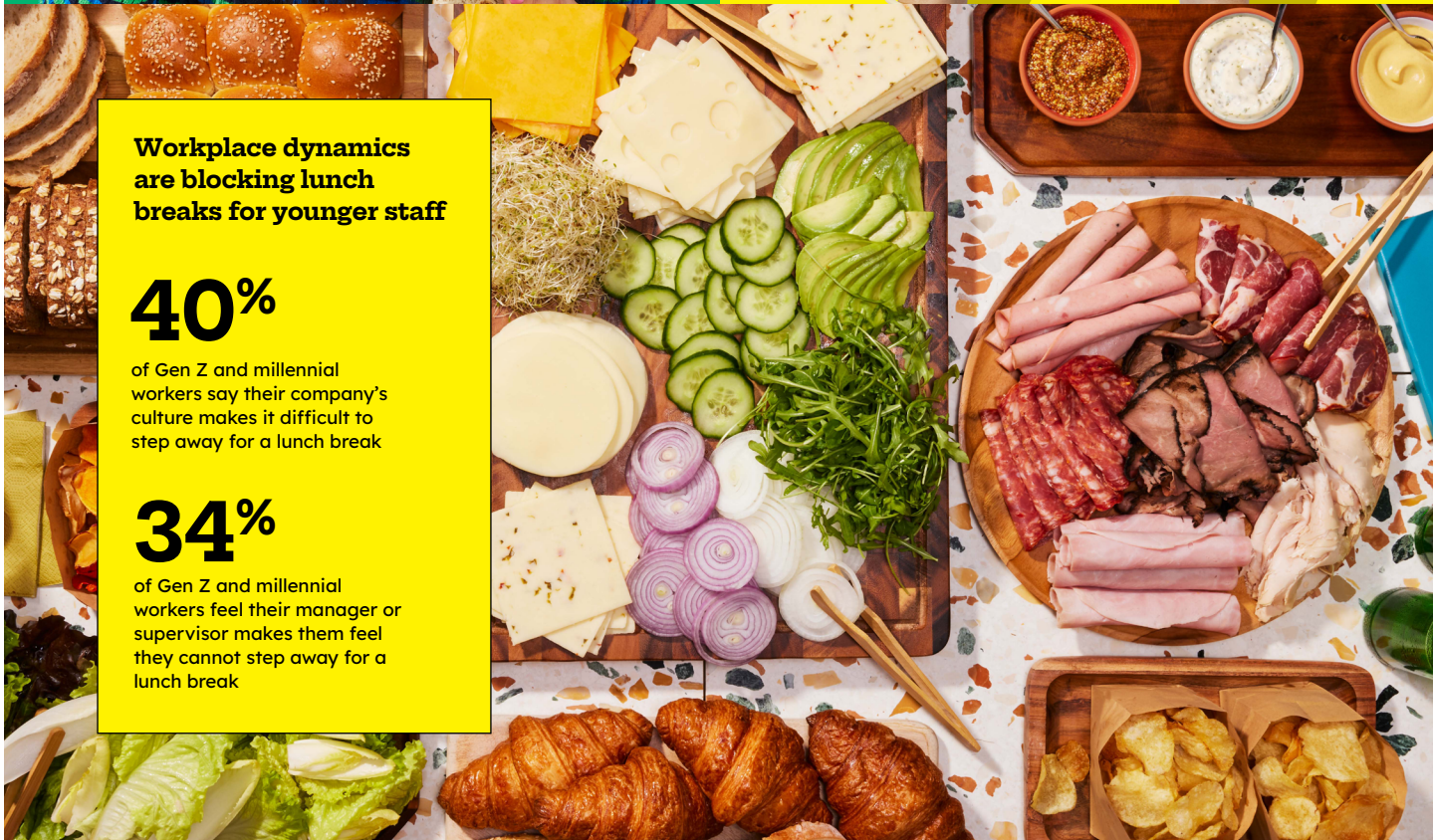
Workplace dynamics are blocking lunch breaks for younger staff

40%

of Gen Z and millennial workers say their company's culture makes it difficult to step away for a lunch break

34%

of Gen Z and millennial workers feel their manager or supervisor makes them feel they cannot step away for a lunch break



Easy wins to fuel a better (and happier) workforce

06

When it comes to building a happier, more energized workforce, even small changes can create big results. Thoughtful considerations — like encouraging meaningful breaks or showing appreciation — can transform the workday, lift morale, and boost your team’s performance. And you don’t need a large budget to make a difference. Here are a few high-impact, easy-to-implement ways to help your team feel valued and supported.

1

Treat your team to breakfast

With 70% of employees skipping breakfast at least once per week, offering local pastries and hot coffee, fresh fruit and iced lattes, breakfast burritos and café con leche, or any other tasty combo of caffeine and carbs can help fight the onset of midday hanger while making mornings something to look forward to.

2

Maximize meeting time with the right lunch

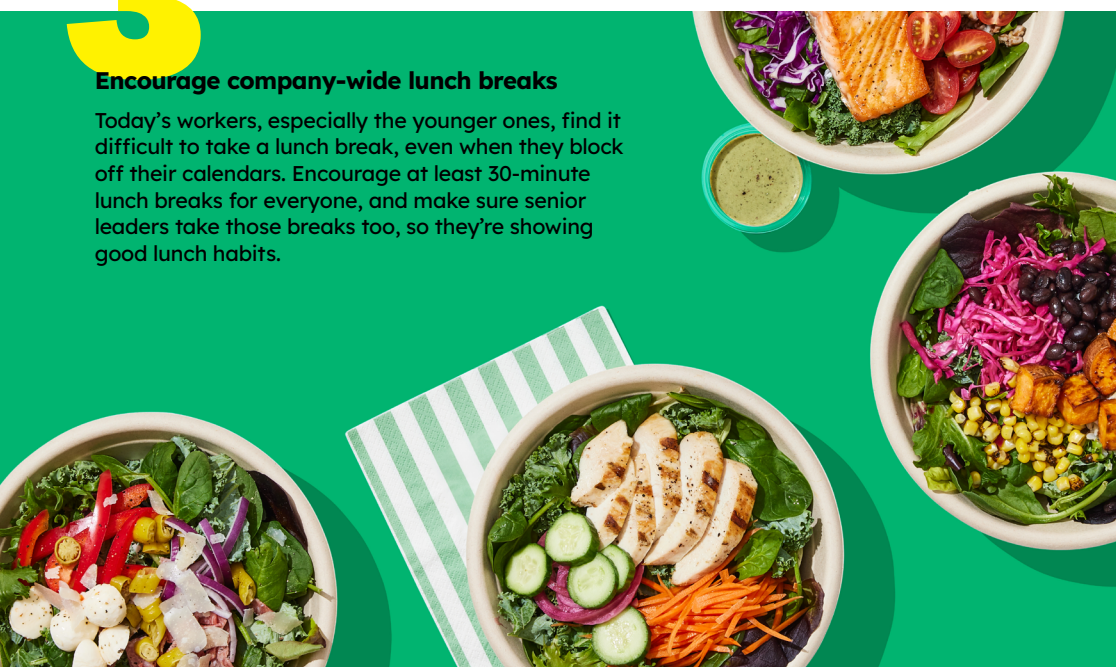
Nearly three in four employees say meetings are more productive and collaborative when food is served. Individual items like boxed lunches and sandwiches top the list, with 45% of employees preferring them for meetings — far ahead of shared trays (30%) or full-service catering (25%). If you want a lunch option that delivers on customization, ease, and flexibility, boxed lunches have you covered.



3

Encourage company-wide lunch breaks

Today’s workers, especially the younger ones, find it difficult to take a lunch break, even when they block off their calendars. Encourage at least 30-minute lunch breaks for everyone, and make sure senior leaders take those breaks too, so they’re showing good lunch habits.



4

Combat rising costs with free or subsidized meals

Employees of all ages are feeling the pinch of rising costs. One way to support your team is by offering free or subsidized meals onsite, even if it’s just once or twice a week. This lunchtime perk helps offset rising food expenses, and shows genuine appreciation for their hard work.

The easiest way to bring in a variety of delicious cuisine? **Relish by ezCater**, our employee meal program solution.

With Relish, you set the subsidy and schedule, and your employees order exactly what they want from a rotating list of approved restaurants. This way, workers can still indulge in the high-quality midday meals they crave, but without the extra strain on their wallets — or yours.

Happier, more productive employees? That's the power of lunch.

Free or subsidized lunch fuels great work and even greater workplaces. See how ezCater can help you feed any size team, on any budget.

[Learn more about ezCater >](#)

