

How much is your lunch break worth?

Only one in three South Africans take their full lunch break, research by CareerJunction revealed Monday, 22 October 2018. The Cost of a Lunch Break Survey was conducted amongst 3,000 South African working respondents, with results indicating that more than a third of South Africans skip their lunch break altogether between two to four times per week.



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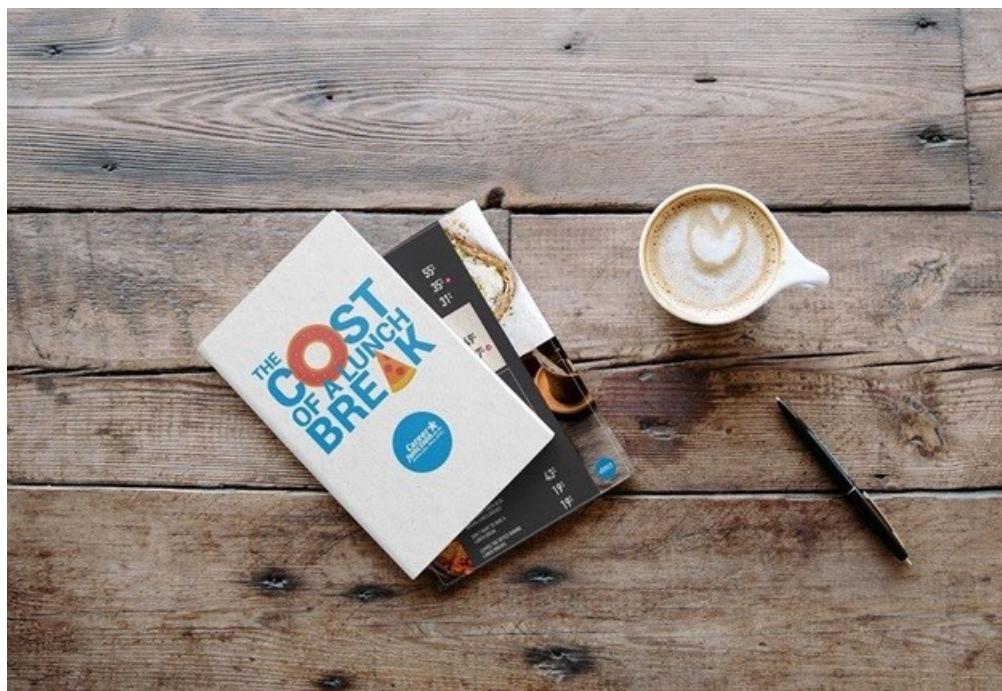
“The average South African works two and a half years overtime during their lifetime due to unused lunch breaks. That amounts to a staggering *R512,465 worth of free work and unnecessary time spent at their desks instead of taking a break,” says Odile Badenhorst, CareerJunction’s communications manager.

Despite there being no written rule, employees have an unhealthy belief that it’s expected of them to skip lunch. “In this fast-paced world of work, it’s a common, and unhealthy, mindset that the more hours we work, with no break, the more we’ll be admired or rewarded,” she adds.

The upside to downtime

The truth is quite the contrary - according to [research](#), it has long been proven that regular breaks, and a healthy, well-balanced lunch break in particular, increase employee productivity, improve mental well-being, boost creativity, and encourage healthy habits in the workplace.

The Cost of a Lunch Break Survey confirms this; when asked how skipping their lunch breaks makes them feel, most respondents listed unhappy, indifferent and stressed as emotions that accompany them when working through their lunch breaks. So, why then, are we working ourselves until burn out?



CareerJunction says that the research also showed that while the average lunch break allocated to employees is 60 minutes, the average time taken each day by South African employees is only 24,5 minutes. Only 5% take their full 60 minutes and although over two thirds say their employer encourages them to take lunch, 19% claimed they feel pressured not to take lunch, while 38% have too much work. In fact, 73% of participants said the reason they skip their lunch break is because they have too much work to do or an unexpected task cropped up.

What's for lunch?

A large percentage, 67%, said they eat at their desks while working, with nearly 60% eating leftovers or a packed lunch. And, even though most workers have access to a full kitchen or seating area, many prefer to eat at their desks, with 45% saying they spend under R100 per week on lunch. Therefore, the fact that 57% of respondents said that the availability of amenities close to work – such as restaurants, shops, delis, convenience stores – has no impact on their choice of job application, makes sense when you look at the majority bringing lunch from home, or not taking lunch at all.

Smoke breaks have long been a contentious issue in the work place with many non-smokers resenting the number of extra breaks smokers get. Smokers in South Africa take, on average, three to four smoke breaks a day with 42% of their colleagues saying they don't mind if they do. 29% said they didn't know or care.



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Aphelele Tapile 31 Oct 2016



So, why aren't South Africans taking lunch breaks? "While our research revealed that the majority of South African employees listed unexpected work responsibilities or too much work as reasons, other reasons included having to cover for others, sacrificing lunch breaks to leave work earlier, financial difficulties or simply not caring about lunch," adds Badenhorst.

While it's encouraging to see, from the research conducted, that the 'work till burnout' culture is largely coming from the

employees themselves rather than being enforced by employers, Badenhorst is still calling on employers to encourage their staff to take regular breaks away from their desks and enjoy all the benefits that come with this.

For the full survey results, visit www.careerjunction.co.za/lunch

*Full-time work life from 18 to 65 years old. Working days in a year: 260 days (365 days minus weekends. StatsSA average monthly earnings paid to employees in the formal non-agricultural sector at R13,621 a month.

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