

Meal Break – Summary of Issues

A genuine break from the job

- Many members said that the key problem with a lack of meal breaks is the inability to "relax and recline", it's a meal, not a break. Sometimes people need time out more than they need food.
- Paramedics work in a challenging environment, meal breaks are also required to disengage from work stressors, reset and recharge. They assist staff in maintaining physical and psychological health and wellbeing, reducing stress and burnout in high stress roles and building and maintaining resilience.
- When out and about in public, paramedics are routinely engaged in conversation by the public. As representatives of AV, and in uniform, paramedics must be polite and responsive. It is difficult to sit in public areas and disengage.

Food consumption outside of branches

- Many staff have allergies or specific dietary requirements. This means that purchase of food is extremely difficult, and in some extreme examples, this may mean that there are no safe options other than personally prepared food.
- Lack of nutrition can be an issue outside of ordinary café opening hours.
- Transportation of food for people that wish to eat personally prepared meals can be problematic from a space, hygiene and OHS perspective.

Facilities for a break and for preparing food and drinks

- A microwave, hot and cold water and facilities for basic food preparation is essential and supports staff who wish to prepare their own food.
- Dedicated facilities are essential for some rest and recline during breaks, particularly during night shifts where there is a significant fatigue risk at the end of the shift.
- Many paramedics feel strongly that hospital staff do not want their break rooms crowded with ambos (which impacts on the quality of break and ability to relax)
- Several paramedics commented that for women, "there are certain things that are nice to manage at branch instead of hospital toilets".

Completing shifts close to end of shift time/break logistics

- Not having breaks at branch provides limited ability to restock, and refueling the vehicle can also be problematic.
- Many staff have raised concerns about travelling back to branch when shifts end, meaning they could get a 0 and be working overtime as a result.
- The time allocated to get meals for breaks on the road is too little, many paramedics believe it is unrealistic to drive somewhere, park and drive back in a 15 minute window.