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French turn to quick snacks

Food industry officials have revealed that the average French mid-day meal now lasts only 38 minutes, less than half as long as 25 years ago.

French people have even begun to eat in the office, which was once unheard of.

The French have also become the biggest sandwich-eaters in Europe after the British.

A manager for Paris sandwich chain Lina's, told BBC News Online that France's employment laws were partly responsible for the curtailed lunch hours.

The 35-hour week has forced people to do more in the fewer hours they spend at work, she said.

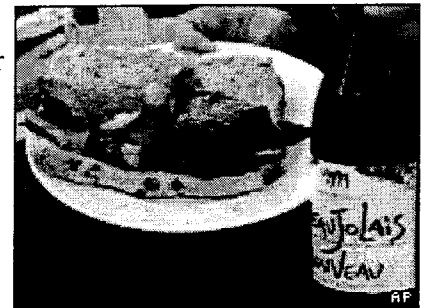
"Before people had a lot of time to take their meals but now they have less time during their working day," she said. "Twelve to three used to be much more important."

In addition to the time factor, there was also a financial one, she said: French people were looking for ways to save money. Seven sandwiches are consumed in France for every one hamburger, and that the industry's turnover has capped two billion euros.

Sandwich chains had 458 bars in France in 1992 but now have 1,466 - more than three times as many.

Meanwhile, the number of sandwiches they prepare has grown by 476%.

FRENCH SANDWICH FACTS FOR 2002



Seven sandwiches consumed for every one hamburger
765 million sandwiches sold
Turnover - more than 2bn euros

476% rise in chain sandwich consumption in the last 10 years

Market growth 7-8%

Source: FFB Communications and Gira research group

By John Ketbapp
BBC News Online