

CRAIN'S

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Sure, bankers are easy targets, but many more share the blame

—Mair Tausend
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Let's do brown-bag

Workers replace takeout with leftovers

BY LISA FICKENSCHER

IT HAS BEEN TWO MONTHS SINCE Eda Kalkay and her husband, David Nowak, slashed their household budget and began toting yogurt, salad and soup to work. The money they have saved by cutting out \$10 to \$15 lunches at a deli is sitting in a new bank account that already contains over \$1,000, Ms. Kalkay boasts. "I was throwing money down the drain," says the executive, who owns an eponymous public relations firm. "We figured we were just being lazy by not taking our dinner leftovers to the office." Ms. Kalkay and Mr. Nowak, marketing director at Noble House Wines, are among a growing group of penny-pinching New Yorkers

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LUNCH TABS

Le Pain Quotidien

To-go baguette of Paris ham & Gruyère cheese

\$8.13

Kushi-Q

Salmon bento box with miso soup

\$8.20

Hale & Hearty

Medium chicken-barley soup with half a sandwich

\$8.39

BUSINESS LIVES

Brown bagging is new takeout

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putting lunch on their financial diet plan. Though they can still afford to buy lunch, cutting back feels like the responsible thing to do now.

There are no official statistics about brown baggers, but anecdotal evidence abounds—from quick-service restaurants' reporting lower sales to workers' noticing cluttered office refrigerators.

The savings add up, considering that a takeout lunch generally costs between \$8 and \$13, and as much as \$15 with a beverage, according to restaurant consultant Erik Blauberg.

"Half the people in my firm bring their lunch on a regular basis," says John Karel, managing director of Glocap Search, a Manhattan recruiting company with 75 staffers.

Fewer visits

DINERS USED TO WAIT in long lines at Japanese lunch spot Kushi-Q for boxes of rice and lettuce topped with skewered meats and vegetables. But sales at the midtown eatery were off 15% in January from a year earlier. To boost revenues, managing partner Jeannie Yuin is now offering breakfast service.

"We are seeing the same familiar faces, but they are coming less fre-

quently," says Ms. Yuin, who adds that customers are less inclined to include a drink or chips.

Many office workers who are scrimping on lunch are not entirely thrilled with their newfound frugality. They complain about lugging plastic containers on their commute and eating the same thing several times a week. And they miss the social benefits of running out with a colleague to grab a bite or just escaping the office for 30 minutes.

"I get crazy at 5:30 when I realize that I haven't been outside all day," says Jessica Sigelbaum, publicity and global licensing manager at Playboy Enterprises.

Even so, she's willing to endure a little cabin fever. Ms. Sigelbaum started making her meals several months ago, when she discovered how much money she could save by shopping for lunch fare at Trader Joe's in Union Square. She now stores packages of turkey, cheese and bread at work and whips up a fresh sandwich rather than having to eat a soggy item made the night before.

Stephanie Middleberg, a dietician for Nu-Train, made a New Year's resolution to get her finances in order. Her first step was signing up for Mint.com, which tracks sub-

scribers' spending and helps them create a budget. When Ms. Middleberg saw that food was her second-biggest expense, she axed her pricey on-the-go lunches.

"Now I'm going to the ATM once a week instead of two or three times," she says.

Stuffing the fridge

EVEN MS. MIDDLEBERG'S clients are asking for advice on what to prepare at home and bring to work.

"It used to be that I was advising people on healthy-choice restaurants and healthy picks at restaurants," she says. "There has been a huge shift toward how to stock your pantry."

The office refrigerator at marketing firm Lippe Taylor has gotten so full that Senior Vice President Charly Rok has resorted to sending out Friday e-mails reminding colleagues to take home uneaten food.

Of course, plenty of people continue to fork it over for their midday meal. The Hale & Hearty chain reports that sales are slightly up so far this year compared with the 2008 period. Chief Executive Simon Jacobs concedes that he's surprised.

"I don't know if we are gaining market share or if soup is a source of

RECIPES FOR PACKING

PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY ROLLUPS

- 8 flour tortillas, 2 oz. softened cream cheese, 1/4 c. jelly or preserves, smooth peanut butter
- Combine cream cheese and jelly in a bowl. Spread one tortilla with a thin layer of mixture; top with another tortilla. Spread top tortilla with peanut butter. Gently roll up. Wrap individually in plastic wrap. If possible, refrigerate at least one hour. To serve, slice roll in half or into bite-size pieces.

CHICKEN SALAD WRAPS

- 2 10 oz. cans of chunk chicken, 1/4 c. chopped onion, 1/4 c. mayonnaise, 4 tbs. fresh salsa, salt and pepper to taste, 6 10" flour tortillas, 12 lettuce leaves
- Mix chicken, onion, mayonnaise, salsa, salt and pepper in a bowl. Line each tortilla with two lettuce leaves,

then divide chicken salad mixture evenly among tortillas and roll up.

PASTA PRIMAVERA SALAD

- 1 box tricolor bowtie pasta, 1 box tricolor pasta twists, 1 zucchini, 1 red pepper, 1 green pepper, 1 purple onion, 1 bunch green onions, 1 bunch broccoli crowns, 3 to 4 carrots, 1 bottle Italian dressing, 1/2 c. shredded or grated Parmesan cheese, 1 small can sliced black olives (optional), salt and pepper
- Dice or thinly slice veggies. Cook pasta according to box directions for al dente. Combine pasta, veggies and dressing in a large bowl. Sprinkle with cheese, add salt and pepper to taste and toss. Chill before serving.

Source: recipe4living.com

STUCKE/PHOTO

comfort at a time like this," Mr. Jacobs says. "I hear that Campbell's is doing well."

On the other hand, sales at Le Pain Quotidien have slipped. But the chain, which operates 15 spots in the city, notes that its new baguette to-go sandwiches, offered only at the Bryant Park location,

have been popular.

An upcoming midtown store will offer a "grab and go" option, says Jack Moran, Le Pain's vice president of food, beverage and brand, who believes people will tire of hauling their lunch into the office.

"We are hedging on the lazy brown bagger," he says. ■