Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English – the show that brings you an interesting topic, authentic listening practice and six items of incredibly useful vocabulary. I'm Dan…

And I'm Neil. In this programme we’ll be discussing the lovely topic of lunch – and what our lunch choices say about us. So, Dan, what are you doing for lunch today?

Ah Neil, are you asking me to join you? I’d love to, thanks. There’s this great little Vietnamese place we have to check out, right next to the office if you just…

Ah, actually – I was just asking to… open up today’s topic. Sorry. You see, I’ve brought a sandwich.

Oh, a sandwich. Again! How dull. Well, you’re not the only one – a survey from 2012 showed a third of Britons eat exactly the same thing for lunch – every day! And yes, it’s mostly sandwiches.

I had a curry yesterday.

Well, it’s almost lunchtime so we’d better get on with our question, which is: how long is the average lunch break in the UK? Is it:

a) An hour and a half
b) 45 minutes
c) 25 minutes
Neil
Oh, I wish it was an hour and a half, but I’m pretty sure it must be c) 25 minutes

Dan
Well, we'll find out if you’re right… just before lunch! All this talk of lunch is actually making me feel a bit peckish.

Neil
Peckish is a great word isn’t it – it’s a slang word for being a bit hungry. Feeling peckish, Dan?

Dan
I am now. Now, about you and your sandwiches Neil. Two slices of bread with filling might be the most popular British lunch choice, but it didn’t use to be that way. Listen to food writer Bee Wilson. Which adjective does she use to describe sandwiches?

INSERT
Bee Wilson, Author
They were what you had in an emergency. They were what you had on a long train journey. It was a kind of makeshift lunch when you couldn’t get anything better.

Dan
So – sandwiches had humble origins as makeshift meals. Makeshift describes something temporary and low quality – a solution you create when you can’t do anything better.

Neil
I can’t help feel this is all getting a little personal, Dan.

Dan
There’s a sometimes very practical reason to eat a sandwich – like on a train. On a weekday in the office though, there’s no excuse.

Neil
If you worked as hard as I did, Dan – you’d only have time for a sandwich!

Dan
Which is just what Bee Wilson was saying – we treat lunchtime as if it were an emergency. It says something about our attitude to work and food in the UK. Next, let’s hear from philosopher Julian Baggini with his view on eating the same thing every day.

Neil
And let’s teach one more word first – utilitarian. It describes something practical and useful, rather than attractive.
Julian Baggini, Philosopher

What lunch says about us is that we’re still very much stuck in this kind of quite functional, you know, efficient, utilitarian attitude of how we should construct our daily lives; and that for all our embrace of this great food culture and everything, we haven’t managed to make that an everyday thing – it remains something for the special occasions.

Neil

So – he thinks we live in a world where we value being efficient – where we have a functional, utilitarian attitude to life.

Dan

Exactly, we’re aware of a great food culture, we embrace this culture – but only for special occasions.

Neil

Yes – let’s look at that word embrace. It normally means this… let me just…

Dan

Oh Neil, I didn’t know you cared. Neil just hugged me, wrapped his arms around me, embraced me.

Neil

Just as we can embrace physical things and people – we can also embrace ideas.

Dan

Here’s an idea I embrace, Neil. We should all embrace new foods. Broaden our horizons.

Neil

To broaden our horizons means ‘to open our minds and experience new things’.

Dan

Let me broaden your horizons right now. Experts from Cornell University say it leads to better team spirit if colleagues eat together.

Neil

OK, I get the picture. I should ditch my sandwich and eat with you. In the name of team spirit – that is – getting on well with team members – having a feeling of belonging.

Dan

Finally, Vietnamese?

Neil
Oh yes, but not before you tell me the answer to today’s question. How long do Brits take for lunch?

Dan
Well the answer was c) 25 minutes. That comes from a survey done by the BBC this year to find out about our modern dining habits.

Neil
25 minutes? It’s a crying shame, Dan. But before we have lunch ourselves, let’s run over the vocab one more time.

Dan
First up we had peckish. It means ‘hungry – just a little hungry’. I’m feeling rather peckish at the moment, you?

Neil
I think I’ve gone beyond peckish, Dan. Roll on lunch. Next?

Dan
We had makeshift – which describes a temporary or low quality solution. For example, last week my team’s goalkeeper was sick, so I had to replace him as a makeshift goalie.

Neil
Or, another example – when I was a student I used the steel bin in my room as a makeshift drum.

Dan
I’m sure the neighbours loved that. Now what about this word utilitarian? In the context we used it, it means ‘simple and functional, rather than beautiful’.

Neil
Do you think it would be fair to describe your polo shirt as utilitarian?

Dan
I prefer classic and timeless. Please.

Neil
But enough of all this banter. You know, I believe we should all just get along.

Dan
Oh, are you going to hug me again? To embrace me?

Neil
Not this time, let’s stick with the metaphorical meaning – ‘to accept a new belief or idea’.
Dan
For example, I wasn’t sure about the new website design, but now I fully embrace it.

Neil
Very nice. And I embrace your suggestion that colleagues should eat together.

Dan
It looks like you’ve broadened your horizons.

Neil
Well, when I taught English in Spain, Japan, Poland and the Czech Republic, it really broadened my horizons and taught me about new ways of life. How about you?

Dan
Yes, they say travel broadens the mind – it certainly broadened my horizons too.

Neil
Even better – why don’t we go travelling together – with the whole Learning English team?

Dan
Yeah! That would be wonderful for team spirit – the good feeling of being together. Maybe to Cambodia?

Neil
It certainly would. And that’s the end of today’s 6 Minute English. Please join us again soon, after our delicious lunch!

Dan
And we are on social media too. Make sure to visit our Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube pages.

Both
Bye!