

Fast Fact Friday

Meal & Rest Breaks

Friday, November 14, 2025

Q1: “How did the Meal and Rest Break language come to be included in our Pink Contract (Article 8.11)?”

For many years, Southwest Airlines had language about crew-coordinated meal and rest breaks in our Flight Attendant Handbook. In a revision of our FAH completed years ago, Southwest Airlines removed that language. Our Negotiating Team went to the table to ensure that on-duty breaks were codified as contractual protections. While the new language in Article 8.11 can be seen as “vague,” it establishes a permanent requirement for breaks that cannot be changed or removed without negotiation - as opposed to what happens with our Work and Conduct Rules. Codifying on-duty break language protects our current practice, while allowing for future improvements through Section 6 bargaining.

Q2: “I am STARVING! How do I go about taking a much needed break to eat?”

As we have always done, you will need to coordinate with your fellow crewmates to ensure that all safety duties are covered and passenger needs are met. Instead of a structured, assigned break system (like you will find in traditional employment environments), this language allows our Flight Attendants the flexibility to take breaks to eat, pump, rest, etc. when they are needed.

Q3: “Is our pay or duty day affected by taking a meal and/or rest break?”

No. Our meal and rest breaks do not affect the duty day calculation, nor do they impact your pay. The duty clock keeps ticking and our pay is unaffected.

Q4: “If I’m taking a quick break and a call light goes off, can I ignore it?”

No. Just like before this language was codified in our Contract, our duties as a Flight Attendant are to maintain the safety and well-being of our passengers for the entirety of the flight. Historically, Flight Attendants have always looked out for each other to ensure that there are no assigned sections on our aircraft. If a call-light goes off and all Flight Attendants are needed (i.e., medical emergency), it is expected that all Flight Attendants respond expeditiously.



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Q5: “Is it true that our Union negotiated away the California protections regarding meal and rest breaks and compensation?”

False. Prior to a change in the law (due to a court case), there were no meal/rest protections for those covered under the Railway Labor Act (RLA) on the state level. Several Unions covered under the RLA, including Flight Attendants at TWU Local 556, 577 and 579, the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA), the Association of Professional Flight Attendants (APFA), the Air Line Pilot Association (ALPA), along with Railway Labor Unions, lobbied for protections to be included in the law. This paved the way for us to be able to collectively bargain for meals and rest breaks. The Pink Contract, ratified in May of 2024, did just that! Our new Contract added and codified language in Article 8.11 which affords us the opportunity to take much needed breaks. Because of our unique position and schedules, applying mandatory regulated practices (such as scheduled breaks) is more of a challenge than in a traditional 9-to-5 setting. Similar to nurses, firefighters, etc., when duty calls, we must ensure that safety is not compromised. Like we saw with the “Hourly Wages” state law requirement, Southwest Airlines and our Union had to create protections that fit our work environment... while complying with the intent of the law.

Bonus Question: “I got a call from a Supervisor who said that they observed me reading my book and drinking a coffee for 15 minutes on my flight. I explained that I had coordinated with my Crew to take my rest break on our 5 hour flight. Am I going to get into trouble?”

No. Just like all of the items that were new, modified or enhanced in the Pink Contract, we agreed to the timeline to implement the new language, which went into effect May 1, 2024. As long as the conditions are met, this language protects you in these situations. Your best course of action is to immediately contact a Member of the Grievance Team to ensure that your right to take a meal and/or rest break is protected.

