

# THE TOP SIX

## NERD FOODS OF ALL TIME

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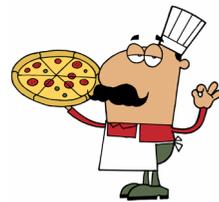
### 1. **HOT POCKETS®**

The king of microwave snacks. Developed by Paul and David Merage who immigrated to the U.S. from Tehran in 1961 to pursue the American Dream. They ended up creating the dream food for children across America coming home from school in search of a quick snack, after safely dropping their backpack full of homework somewhere in the house where it will not be encountered until the following morning.

While parents would still be at work (making money to buy Hot Pockets), their children could savor this tasty, filling delight, neatly enveloped in a crispy crust....if microwaved correctly. If microwaved incorrectly, i.e., in the nuker for too long, children could experience the joy of biting into molten lava, and learn that searing the roof of their mouth and tongue is worse than doing homework.

### 2. **PIZZA**

The origins of pizza are deep and mysterious,....which basically means that so many people and cultures have claimed the invention of pizza, that who gets credit for it, basically comes down to: whoever makes up the best story about throwing some toppings on a piece of flatbread and baking it, wins.



And clearly, the Italians are the winners.....although, by far, more pizzerias in America are owned and operated by non-Italians (in particular, the Greeks), than Italians. But who's complaining when you can get an order of baklava or loukomadies (Greek doughnuts) when you pick up your slice.

Pizza had been around for generations before it became so insanely popular after the Second World War. And there are all sorts of crazy stories about why this is so. Some claim it was our U.S. soldiers, who served in Italy, brought back with them charming memories of this Italian delicacy. WRONG. During the war, Italy was gripped by poverty, destruction, hardship and misery; so it's not like there were all these cute little pizzerias in picturesque villages welcoming hungry Americanos.

Another story is that pizza swelled in popularity with the wave of Italian immigrants coming to America. WRONG. Currently, there are more than four times more Americans of English descent as compared to Italians (26% to 6%). So if it were just a matter of immigrant numbers, our restaurant landscape should be cluttered with Brit-terias delivering boxes and boxes of Bangers & Mash, and Black Pudding.....oh joy.....

The real reason, unsurprisingly, is the nerds. They were completely responsible for developing the technology around pizza making and delivery. They masterminded the creation of massive, reliable steel ovens, clever pre-cut pizza boxes with easy assembly, food prep and distribution of gigantic bags of chilled shredded mozzarella and sliced pepperoni, and, don't forget the rise of the nerd-crafted automobile, where everyone gets a car, and the opportunity to deliver pizza. Add to this, their brainchild of the modern, electrified, refrigerated grocery store which is fully stacked with cheap frozen pizzas (introduced in 1957) that can be heated up in a jiffy by all members of the family.

Although many nerds are good cooks, there are many, many more who wouldn't know a bouillabaisse from a gazpacho. So when you're pulling an all-nighter in college, what could be better

than someone delivering to your door, a hot meal and a cask of Mountain Dew, where none of it requires silverware.

Pizza has become so popular, that approximately 350 slices are eaten every second in America, while the average person consumes 23 lbs. of pizza per year. Interestingly, to burn off this amount of calories, one would have to run about 13 marathons each year. Or, one can just order a larger size of jeans for \$25 and have it delivered to your home, just as the pizza delivery dude is rolling up to your home.

Finally, with the advent of the technological marvel of the microwave, who can deny the beauty and contentment of warming up a slice of cold pizza in the morning after one has been “building foundations” the night before with shots of adult beverages.

By the way, not everyone loves pizza, as crazy as that may sound. One of the first messages Samuel Morse, tapped out on his new telegraph invention was:

*“Pizza is a species of most nauseating looking cake ... covered over with slices of pomodoro or tomatoes, and sprinkled with little fish and black pepper and I know not what other ingredients, it altogether looks like a piece of bread that had been taken reeking out of the sewer.”*

Similarly, not all Italians are enamored by pizza either. Carlo Collodi, author of *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, reckoned that:

*“Pizza is the appearance of complicated filth.”*

### **3. JUNK FOOD SNACKS**

The varieties and range of junk food manufactured for our ever-eager taste buds, is comparable to the bio-diversity found in many of the world’s most complex ecological systems. This diversity is mirrored in the ingredients of junk food as well. Consider the ingredients found in one, small Doritos chip:

Ingredients: Whole Corn, Corn, Vegetable Oil (Corn, Canola, and/or Sunflower Oil), Corn Dextrin, Salt, Cheddar Cheese (Milk, Cheese Cultures, Salt, Enzymes), Whey, Monosodium Glutamate, Buttermilk, Romano Cheese (Part-Skim Cow's Milk, Cheese Cultures, Salt, Enzymes), Whey Protein Concentrate, Onion Powder, Corn Flour, Natural and Artificial Flavor, Dextrose, Tomato Powder, Lactose, Spices, Artificial Color (Including Yellow 6, Yellow 5, Red 40), Lactic Acid, Citric Acid, Sugar, Garlic Powder, Skim Milk, Red and Green Bell Pepper Powder, Disodium Inosinate, and Disodium Guanylate.

And, mind you, this is a truncated version of all the ingredients, as some listed items (Natural and Artificial Flavors, and Spices) represent collections of other groups of ingredients. If the individual items in these groups were all written out, in all likelihood there wouldn't be any room on the package to put the product name on it, to identify what it is you are eating.

For the layman, this Doritos ingredients list, can be a little intimidating. But for the nerdy food engineer it's as plain as day. For example they would actually know why you would add Disodium Inosinate to a flavorful snack. Because not only is it tasty, but it is also kosher, halal and vegan,.....an equal opportunity flavor enhancer.

Another one of the more inexplicable items on the list is the ambiguous item of: Vegetable Oil (Corn, Canola, and/or Sunflower Oil). What does this mean? Are they not sure exactly what oil they are putting in the Doritos? Is there some unstable guy sitting in the back of the manufacturing plant, named Unhinged Bill, who's randomly pouring different oils into the production line for his own amusement? Or did they accidentally slosh together two different bins of vegetable oil when they were unloading the trucks carrying the ingredients on the delivery dock?.....so they just said "F\*\*\* it", we'll just use whatever this mix of oil is for the Doritos." Who knows?

Beyond these mysteries, you've got hand it to the nerd food engineers. Their talents and skills in creating and crafting scrumptious and very welcome snacks for the general public,

is on a scale similar to the lofty achievements conceived by such creative classical music geniuses like Mozart, Bach and Beethoven. Just as those geniuses took the 12 notes of the tonal scale and created monumental and lasting compositions for the benefit of man, food engineers have taken a limited number of chemicals, and have invented incredibly delicious and enduring snacks that continue to tantalize the global public.

- Last count there were over 218 different theme and variations of Lay's potato chips flying off the shelves around the world.
- Frito Lay, itself, has composed over 520 different snack opuses.
- The grand symphonic global savory snack food market size in 2020 was \$215.9 billion, an amount that is equal to the entire GDP of Greece. (Considering Greece's perpetual financial crises, perhaps someone should tell them that they need to move away from olive, and olive oil production, in favor of producing Cheetos and Tostitos.)

But perhaps the greatest achievement of food techies is that they have been able to design hundreds, if not thousands, of savory snacks while also ensuring that there is absolutely no nutritional value in any of them. And they said it couldn't be done...

#### 4. **FAST FOOD**



According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (the CDC), more than one-third of adult Americans eat fast food on any given day. That's more than 100 million people a day faced with the question: *"Do you want fries with that shake?"*

The state with the greatest concentration of fast food joints per capita is Alabama, whose state motto is: “*Audemus Jura Nostra Defendere*”, which translated into English means “*We Dare Defend our Rights to Fast Food, Now and Forever, Can I get an Amen?*”

OK, so maybe that’s not exact the translation from Latin,..... but for fast-food-ophiles, Lynyrd Skynyrd certainly summed it up with their vittles anthem, *Sweet Home Alabama*. For every 10,000 people in Alabama there are 6.3 fast food restaurants, as compared to the oft maligned State of New Jersey, the most densely populated state in the nation, which comes in at 2.0 fast food places per 10,000 people.

The global fast food market is valued at well over \$600 billion per year, and is rising at 4.6% per year. (Sadly, this amount of money could put an end to world hunger and poverty three times over each year.) Yet there is no end in sight for fast food being a dominant provider of sustenance to the world’s population.

Granted, the traditional burger, fries and Coke, does not appeal to everyone. To instantly satisfy those who have a broader palate, there has been a resultant explosion of fast food international cuisines like Mexican, Chinese, and Donutese. Additionally, the fast food menus at each establishment are constantly expanding like the waistline of America to entice customers with the newest, most pleasing, yummy item.

It is not coincidental that the rise of fast food culture has coincided with the ascendancy of the nerds. The most obvious reasons are the triumph of the nerd-inspired car culture, and the busy, technologically connected lifestyle we have adopted. There is often no time for anything, but to drive to the local Mickey D’s, Taco Bell, or Subway, and fill up.

Interestingly, the contribution of nerds goes way beyond these two general trends, which they have sponsored. Where nerds have also scored significant success in handing us fast food on a silver platter. More specifically, it is what magic they have conjured behind the curtain (or rather, counter).

Their inimitable, and really quite admirable, industriousness in problem-solving has produced technologies that have transformed the fast food kitchen and product. The entire design of a fast food restaurant building is an incredible homage to efficiency and productivity.

The equipment and processes needed to prepare the food and drink, and have it waiting for you in seconds, is a phenomenon worthy of NASA. Not to mention, the clever custom types of packaging that must be designed and produced, or the invention of a new automatic refrigerated machine to mass produce a brand new \$1 dessert, or the sneaky development of dreaming up fast food gift cards.

The entire fast food operation is reminiscent of a Rube Goldberg creation, but with the remarkable requirement that it actually has to work in real life, and perform real useful tasks. And, it must also be so easy to operate so that an average high school student who's obsessing about the zit on his or her nose, can still perform their duties while being so very distracted. Fast food production is an art, state-of-the art.

In a complementary way, fast food is strengthening its market share by partnering up with the Uber Eats and DoorDash's of the world. Nerd technologies of ordering, paying for, and having your food delivered with just a few finger strokes on your smartphone, is an irresistible opportunity for instant gratification.

One last thing, before we leave the fast food domain, it is probably worth mentioning the negative effects of fast food consumption. Generally speaking, fast food is often swimming in carbohydrates with no fiber, and doused with excessive amounts of salt, saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol. Everything that makes it taste really, really good.

A steady diet of fast food can lead to experiencing the small print warnings found on drug container labels and commercials:

## WARNING: SAFETY INFORMATION

Do not take FastFood if you are currently experiencing high blood pressure, or are having a heart attack. In some cases FastFood has caused high cholesterol, really ugly acne, dental distress and severe weight gain that generates comments like “Obeast”, “Thunder Thighs”, “Porker” and “Yes, honey, you do look fat in that dress.” Refrain from FastFood, should you experience dizziness, nausea or diarrhea during sex and/or nude sunbathing, Seek immediate medical attention if you lose hearing and/or vision in one eye. Do not wait for the other eye to go blind. Call your doctor should your skin change to the color of a Shamrock Shake. Finally, do not mix FastFood with other medicines, including antibiotics, guanylate cyclase stimulators, Alpha blockers, protease inhibitors, crack, heroin and meth.

## 5. INSTANT RAMEN

When you’re totally pressed for time, or have little more than some lonely spare change in your pocket, is there anything better than a dormant brick of noodles which can magically metamorphose into a hot, hearty and yummy meal in 3 minutes?

With such otherworldly capabilities, ramen’s popularity has skyrocketed around the world. Ramen has become such a legendary staple for so many that a museum honoring ramen was dedicated in 1994 in Yokohama, Japan called 新横浜ラーメン博物館. (That’s “Ramen Museum” in Japanese for those of you who cannot tell your Japanese characters, from your Chinese characters, from your Disney characters.)

Ramen, in its inimitable slab-o-noodles form, was the brainchild of the wonderfully gentle nerd, Momofuku Ando, who was born in Taiwan, and immigrated to Japan after WWII. In post-war Japan times were tough, and there was a national food shortage. Food insecurity was very real, and the Japanese Ministry of Health was advocating for people to eat bread, which could be made by flour,

and supplied by none other than the United States (apparently, to the victor goes the spoils of war).

In contrast, seeing happy Japanese people huddling around noodle stalls in the street markets, being completely inattentive to the Ministry's advice, Ando realized that if he could make an instant noodle dish, perhaps he could solve the hunger problem. Moonlighting in a shed in his backyard, Ando invented a process of flash-frying noodles, and then drying them in cute little rectangular squares that would neatly stack on a grocery store shelf. He called the product: Chikin Ramen. Unfortunately, his noodles were like six times more expensive than the noodle stall price, and were therefore considered a luxury food,.....if you can imagine ramen being called that.



Anyways, when Ando's ramen hit the international market, people went cuckoo (or would that be cock-a-doodle-do) for this instant meal. With the colonization of the ramen packages in grocery store shelves globally, ramen production became much more efficient, and the price rapidly declined.

In a turning of the tables, today it is the Americans who are now buying \$3 billion of instant noodles from Ando's noodle making company, Nissin, every year. Perhaps it is true, as per Ando's famous quotation, no matter where you live: "*Mankind is noodlekind.*"

The role of ramen in the American diet (and international diet, for that matter) continues to swell as it qualifies as a Quintuple Food Threat:

- **Ease of Preparation** - Ramen can be made by anyone, including those who have the culinary skills of a mollusk.
- **Time-savings** – Not only is there minimal time spent preparing a meal, but it can be consumed in almost

the same amount of time, allowing you to carry on with other more important things, like drinking beer, or gaming online.

- **Multiple Flavors** – Ramen comes in so many flavors (if you go to the right shops) you're bound to find one you treasure, like: Tomato Yogurt Ramen, Cheese Curry Ramen, Coffee Milk Ramen, and Summer (yes, apparently Summer is a flavor).
- **Multiple Prep Options** – One can either eat ramen in its soothing warm soup base, or one can drain the liquid and eat just the noodles to limit salt intake for a healthier meal.
- **Slurp Factor Rating** – 10.0 The loud slurping noise one makes when eating ramen has been known to cause parents to lose their minds when finding out that they actually have children that eat like that. Slurping loudly can also be used as an entertaining dating tactic to audibly inform your date that you would rather listen to the sound of your indecent slurping, than hear them talk about themselves.

As proof that ramen's place in the story of humankind has been permanently boiled in the annals of history, the Japanese voted Instant Ramen as the *Country's Best Invention of the 20th Century* (which is coincidentally when the nerds began taking over).

## 6. **NERDS CANDY**

It would be impossible to catalogue the most beloved nerd foods of all time without the eponymous: Nerds Candy. These adorable irregularly shaped pebbles of indescribable sweet and sourness were created by Angelo Fraggos in the modern nerd era of 1983. The brilliance behind is two-fold.

- The first is the ingenious packaging. How great is it to buy one box of candy, but still gain the benefit of getting two flavors! It's the ultimate 2-for.

More importantly, Nerds zeros in on the under-served "obsessive compulsive" candy market for those who don't like their food touching. (There is a name for people who have this condition; it is called brumotactillophobia. "Brumo" derived from the Greek "broma" meaning food in general; "tactillo" derived from the Latin "tacti" meaning touch; and "phobia" meaning "fear or panic". The interesting thing here is that the term brumotactillophobia is derived from two separate languages (Greek and Latin), and yet, here they are touching each other in a mixed word.)

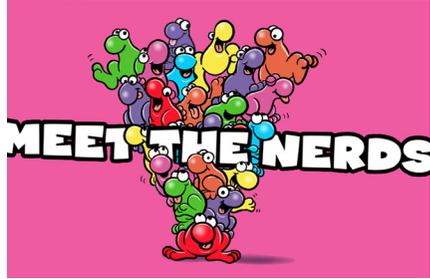
In case you have never had Nerds, besides the fact that you are evidently candy deprived, the box is inventively constructed with a divider in the middle, housing a different flavor on each side. Importantly, the box comes with two separate openings, allowing you to sample each flavor independently, without mixing the two. The most popular Nerds variety has Grape on one side, and Strawberry on the other.

- The second scintillating feature of Nerds is how they are made. The process starts off with a tiny sugar crystal, which is then coated with more sugar in a massive rotating barrel. Once this is complete, it is then coated with more sugar in the barrel for about a billion times. To get the different flavors, one just needs to add a bit of imitation flavor and a boatload of artificial colors; then finish it off with some carnuba wax for a hard crack coating, and voilà,.....Nerds for the herds of nerds.

Nerds were such a smash that they were voted **CANDY OF THE YEAR** in 1985, just two short years after their introduction.

Another great thing about Nerds are the lovable Nerds mascot characters, which are goofy looking, little bulbous anthropomorphic figures that represent Nerds flavors as well as the personality traits of Nerds and their consumers. Note how accurately the flavors resemble some of the most conspicuous attributes of real-life nerds:

- Pink for Curiosity
- Purple for Deep Thinking
- Yellow for Logic
- Red for Creativity
- Green for Humor
- Orange for Spontaneity (Well, maybe Orange is less apt in describing nerds, which is probably the reason that it is the least popular flavor amongst nerd consumers.)



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## **TOP 3** **HONORABLE MENTION** **NERD FOODS OF ALL TIME**

There are a number of other nerd foods that are super popular, but establishing a direct nerd lineage for these products is more difficult. Notwithstanding, here are some worthy of a mention: