

Reader's Digest: My Basic Four

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We all probably eat at least a pound of dirt before we die. It sticks to spinach, it hides in mussels, it gets in when you play softball, fall off playground swings, go picnicking, or ride a pony. Probably you've eaten bugs, too. People on motorcycles swallow a lot of fireflies. Your actual diet, as opposed to your ideal one, is no doubt a nutritional disaster. Back in Home Ec, they quizzed you on nutrition. Do you eat daily recommendations of (1) Meat, fish, and poultry, (2) Dairy, (3) Fruit and vegetables, and (4) Bread and grains?

No, you vulcanize your stomach with pizza and scour it out with Diet Rite. And who can blame you? At a tender age you were stuffed full of boiled, metallic pureed string beans and wheat-pasty applesauce before you graduated to particulate bits of ice-cold hamburger. Then it was the 5000 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Apple crisp in a pleated paper cup. Fish sticks. Tapioca. Aspic. Thruway coffee. Recombinant fruit that ships well and tastes like the truck it rode in on. Turkey roll. Instant whiskey sours. The occasional bad oyster.

Besides, no matter what your favorite foods are, eating them (or anything else) three times a day gets pretty old. If only you could get away with chowing down once a fortnight, like a garter snake, what fun you could have! Raoul's steak au poivre, *ris de veau*, a beautiful fresh salade, pommes frites, a stout red, and something with raspberries in it for dessert. Obviously, a transcendent eating experience is rarely within your reach. Your Basic Four are a combination of childhood habits, adult fantasies, and whatever is available on the corner for delivery after 11. To prove this point, we did a random (well, sort of) poll.

We asked **Mojo Nixon**, the creator of such rock classics as "Debbie Gibson Is Pregnant With My Two-Headed Love Child" and "I'm a Wreck" ("Throwin' up blood in the back of the van/I'm tellin' you buddy, that wasn't my plan!") about his Basic Four:

"You got your Orange Group. That's Cheez-Its, Cheese Nips, toasted cheese, and carrots on religious holidays, y'know, like Elvis's birthday and whenever Otis the Drunk appeared on Andy of Mayberry.

"Then there's the Green Group. Mountain Dew, Sundrop, Gatorade, green Jell-O, green Slurpees. That's all your Green Group there.

"Then there's your Clear Group. Gin, vodka, moonshine. Oh, I forgot to say, under Green is Tanqueray.

"The Red Group is barbecue, all barbecue sauce, especially pork ribs. You got Redd Foxx and Otis Redding, to feed your soul, under the Red Group."

The Church of the SubGenius, a clear-sighted cult of the absurd, states that "Americans should eat like Americans—as fast as they can." **Ben Vaughn**, an acolyte in Camden, New Jersey, claims that the Basic Four Food Groups are: (1) Small (2) Medium (3) Large (4) Extra large.

Nonaffiliated Americans had different ideas.

Zelda Brewer, housewife: (1) Chocolate (2) Licorice (3) Ginger snaps (4) McDonald's hamburgers, the little ones.

Kandi Brewer, pharmacist: (1) Fried sweet stuff (2) Fried salty stuff (3) Tequila (4) Maalox.

James Howard Kunstler, writer: (1) Chinese (2) Indian (3) Southern (4) French.

Amy Godine, writer: (1) Dark chocolate (2) Quality pork products (3) Hot yams (“really hot, with a lot of butter”) (4) Those 15-cent packages of Good & Plenty they sell in Stewart’s, upstate New York’s ubiquitous convenience store.

Janice Krasnow, painter: (1) Carrots (2) Olives (3) Pickles (4) Cinnamon sticks.

Dan Hartman, artist/producer: (1) Pro Optibol Metabolizer Food Supplement (2) Dried sea vegetables (3) Wehani rice cakes (4) Ben & Jerry’s New York Super Fudge Chunk.

The Pop Tarts, performance idols: (1) Sugar cubes (2) Meat loaf (3) Lemon drops (4) Red hot chili peppers.

RuPaul, performer/queen of Manhattan: (1) Sweet stuff (2) Salty stuff (3) Hot ‘n’ tangy stuff (4) Coca-Cola.

Lahoma, performer/former queen of Manhattan: (1) Vodka (2) Sugar (3) Pizza (4) men.

Rodney Anonymous, Dead Milkman: (1) Microwaveable burrito (2) Slim Jim (3) Coffee and cigarettes (4) Beer.

Sheila Soffin, attack cosmetician: (1) Italian (2) Chinese (3) Fast Food (4) Jewish takeout.

Carolyn Anner, student/foxhunter: (1) Sugar (2) Salt (3) Fat (4) Alcohol.

Snooky and Tish, entertainers: (1) Espresso with vitamins (2) White starchy stuff (3) Crunchy greasy stuff (4) Jack Daniels, Johnny Walker, George Dickel, Alka Seltzer with vitamins.

Although I believe the Basic Four are really (1) Grilled cheese sandwiches (2) Frozen margaritas from Miracle Grill (3) Steamed broccoli, and (4) Speed, I think this East Side waitress put it best:

“The Basic Four? That’s easy. They’re (1) Eat (2) Pay (3) Tip, and (4) Get out.”