



HOME FOOD SAFETY MYTHBUSTERS Story:

The Food Safety Generation Gap

College student Erica has moved into her Grandma Shirley's house to help out with errands and meal preparation after Grandma's recent hip surgery. Erica is not a gourmet chef by any means, but she has watched a cooking show or two and knows how to turn out simple meals. While Grandma Shirley is recuperating, she's happy to have Erica take over in the kitchen - all Grandma Shirley asks is that her granddaughter be careful about following good food safety practices. That's because Grandma Shirley knows, as a senior, she's more vulnerable to foodborne illness -- and serious long-term health complications if she does get sick -- and she doesn't need any more health problems right now. Of course, she doesn't want Erica to get sick either, especially with exams coming up.

Section 1

For their first dinner together, Erica prepares meatloaf, mashed potatoes, and tossed salad. Grandma Shirley is enjoying the food until she takes a second bite of salad.

"You did rinse off the greens for the salad, didn't you?" Grandma Shirley asks her granddaughter between chews.

"No, Grandma Shirley, I didn't have to because I used a bag of pre-washed, ready-to-eat lettuce," Erica replies.

Shirley says, "They say you don't need to wash bagged lettuce, but I always give bagged greens an extra rinse under cool water just to make sure all the germs are gone." Shirley pushes the salad aside, but eats the rest of her dinner.

Section 2

The next day, after going to classes, Erica arrives back at her grandmother's with a bag of groceries and begins to put away the food. She notices a package of pork chops, thawing on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator.

Finding her grandmother resting on the sofa, Erica asks, "Grandma Shirley, I thought I'd make chicken for dinner. Would that be OK?"

Grandma Shirley replies, "There's a package of pork chops that I thawed in the refrigerator. We need to use that up tonight because once a food is thawed, it can't be refrozen or it won't be safe to eat. It has to be cooked tonight or tossed out."

Section 3

Later that evening, Erica begins cooking the chops in a pan, while Grandma Shirley supervises. After the pork has been cooking for quite awhile and looks nicely browned, Grandma Shirley notices that Erica is lightly touching each chop with her fingertips.

“Why are you poking the pork with your fingers?” Grandma Shirley asks, not at all pleased.

“Oh, a friend of mine showed me this trick, Grandma Shirley,” Erica says, laughing. “If the chops are brown and feel hot to the touch, then they’re ready to eat.”

“Not in my house!” Grandma Shirley exclaims. “Around here, we use a food thermometer to make sure meat is cooked to a safe internal temperature. Otherwise, we could get food poisoning. You just can’t tell by looking - or feeling - to see if food is properly cooked.”

Section 4

The next day is Saturday and Erica decides the leftover meatloaf and mashed potatoes from Thursday’s dinner will make a quick and tasty lunch for both of them. Erica microwaves the food and then puts it on plates.

After Grandma Shirley finishes her lunch, she says, “You *did* check the meatloaf and mashed potatoes in several spots with a food thermometer after you microwaved them, didn’t you? Food needs to reach a safe internal temperature to make sure bacteria have been killed.”

“No, I didn’t use a food thermometer,” Erica admits. “But, don’t worry - even if food doesn’t get very hot, germs don’t stand a chance when they’re in a microwave. The microwaves zap them to death!”