

MYTHBUSTERS 2010 Story: José and Matt Tackle Food

[College buddies, José and Matt, have just moved into their first apartment. While neither of them could be called a “Top Chef,” they know their way around a microwave and plan to prepare most of their meals at home to save money. José is also very conscious of food safety issues because he got really sick one time from something he ate and he has no desire to “go there” again.]

Paragraph 1

It's Saturday afternoon and Matt is starving after a long bike ride. José walks into the kitchen to find Matt rummaging around in the refrigerator, opening up different containers of deli salads and smelling them. Matt finally settles on some macaroni salad, plops down on the couch to watch a ballgame, and begins eating. José looks over at Matt and asks how long the salad has been in the refrigerator. Matt says “about a week,” but assures José that it's fine to eat the salad because it “smells, looks, and tastes as good as the day we bought it.”

Paragraph 2

José grabs an apple from a bowl of fruit sitting on the kitchen counter. Because he knows the skin of a fruit or vegetable could have harmful bacteria on it, José decides rather than washing the fruit under cool running water and then eating it with the skin on, the safest thing to do is just peel the apple without washing it first and throw away the peel. So, José takes out a clean knife, carefully cuts away the peel and eats the apple.

Paragraph 3

José is still hungry, so he pulls out a lasagna entrée from the freezer and puts it in the microwave. The directions say to microwave the meal for about 16 minutes and then let it stand for an additional 5 minutes before eating. After the microwave beeps to signal the heating is done, José makes no move to get up from the couch even though the ballgame has gone to commercial.

Paragraph 4

When Matt asks José why he isn't getting his food, José says that the lasagna has to stand for the recommended time first. Matt replies that standing time is just to give it a few minutes to cool down, so you don't burn yourself - it's fine to go ahead and eat the lasagna now. José explains that because microwaves cook unevenly there can be cold spots where bacteria can be. By letting the food stand, the heat distributes more evenly throughout the food, completes the cooking process, and gives the heat a chance to kill any remaining bacteria. Once the stand time is over, José adds, you should use a food thermometer to check for a minimum internal temperature of 160° F because it says that on the package directions.

Paragraph 5

Later that afternoon, José leaves for the gym and Matt decides to surprise him by cleaning up the kitchen and sanitizing the counters. Matt has heard that a mixture of water and unscented liquid bleach is an effective and inexpensive sanitizing solution to use, but he's not

sure how much bleach is needed. He decides that for killing bacteria - the more bleach, the better - so Matt stirs a cup of bleach into a quart of water and gets to work on the counters.