

The 30 Pound Club

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Wide Body

We're all concerned about our body weight and fitness, and rightly so. But sometimes, I think we need to understand how excess body weight is affecting our society. Here are a couple of things I've seen recently.

Supersized Chair

In the recent edition of the *Grand Rapids Business Journal*, staff writers reported on the latest newsletter from the office furniture industry, which has been an important manufacturing business in Grand Rapids for many years. The Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturer's Association (BIFMA) develops industry standards for business furniture, including chairs; the association has recently commissioned a leading university to begin testing for the Heavy Occupant Chair Standards. The two factors they're studying are the weight load and the pan width. They're raising the weight load to 400 pounds, up from 350 pounds, and increasing the pan width to 22 inches. Why? Because companies are asking whether the furniture they're buying will be sufficient for some of their heavier employees.

I didn't even know that this industry group existed, but it seems they put a lot of science into the chairs found in offices throughout the country. The typical chair standard had been tested for up to 225 pounds which used to cover 95% of the population. Within the last few years, the standard for average chairs was raised to 253 pounds to include that same 95%. We've gotten heavier as a population, and manufacturers have to make our furniture able to accommodate our girth.

That's important so chairs don't fall apart beneath us, but it obviously has more impact than office furniture. Think of all the places you sit in the course of a year: movie theaters, restaurants, stadiums, classrooms, cars, airplanes, buses. Now think about what it's going to cost if all those seats have to be rebuilt to accommodate 400-pounders. And with bigger seats, fewer seats will be available—there just won't be room for as many as before—so expect ticket prices to increase.

Okay, if hitting you in the wallet doesn't get your attention, think about how embarrassing it would be to get stuck in a too-small seat in any of those places. And parents and grandparents, your lap will be much smaller; think about the ramifications of that.

Double-Wide

Motivation is where you find it. When my mother-in-law had shoulder replacement surgery last year, I saw this wheelchair at the hospital and just had to take a picture of it. It's a double-wide wheelchair. I really don't know what I can say to add to the visual.

Now that Mom is in continuing care, we see even more examples: people in wheelchairs long before their time because they're so big their legs just couldn't hold them up anymore; people who have single rooms because they need extra space to maneuver their supersize wheelchairs—what does that do to the cost of care? And many of the people are there—not at home—because they can't be lifted or moved without the crane for humans that's an essential part of every ward.



Don't get me wrong—the people who work there and take care of Mom are wonderful people, and she's thriving under their care and with all the new friends she's made and new hobbies she's discovered. But I still don't want to live there any time soon.

As long as we're upright, we have a choice: take the action necessary to get our weight where we want to be or sit back, relax, and grow into a double-wide. The choice is ours.

One and Done.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

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