

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BREAST DENSITY

Mammography Is the Gold Standard

The purpose of screening is early detection of breast cancer, meaning we can find it when it's small and most easily treatable. Early detection begins with mammography—the only screening tool proven to reduce breast cancer deaths.

What is Breast Density?

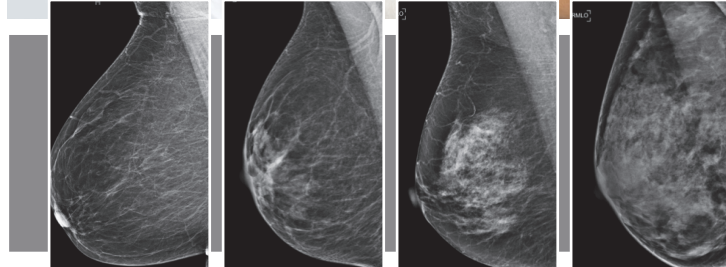
- Breast density is a description of how your breast appears on a mammogram. It is determined by the radiologist, a doctor who reads the mammogram.
- Breasts are made up of fibrous and glandular tissue and fatty tissue. On a mammogram, fibrous and glandular tissue appears white, and fatty tissue appears black. A dense breast contains mostly white fibrous and glandular tissue.
- There are four categories of breast density on a mammogram: almost entirely fatty, scattered areas of fibroglandular density, heterogeneously dense, and extremely dense. Women with mammograms that are heterogeneously dense or extremely dense are considered to have “dense breasts.”
- Breast density may decrease with age, but for most women there is little change.
- Dense breasts are normal and common. About half of all women have dense breasts.

Why is Breast Density Important?

- Having dense breasts may make it more difficult to spot a cancer on a mammogram.
- Dense breast tissue also slightly increases a woman's risk for developing breast cancer. There are factors other than breast density that may place a woman at increased risk for breast cancer, including family history, chest radiation treatments and genetics. You should discuss all risk factors with your doctor.

What Should I Do If I Have Dense Breasts?

It's important to discuss your breast density, along with other factors that may increase your risk for breast cancer, with your primary care provider. Your doctor can recommend the best screening plan based on these factors.



Left to right: Four categories of breast density: almost entirely fatty, scattered areas of fibroglandular density, heterogeneously dense, and extremely dense. Images courtesy of the American College of Radiology (ACR).



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PacMed Follows the American Cancer Society Recommendations and Guidelines:

- Women age 40 to 44 should have the choice to start annual breast cancer screening with mammograms (X-rays of the breast) if they wish to do so.
- Women age 45 to 54 should get mammograms every year.
- Women 55 and older should switch to mammograms every 2 years, or can continue yearly screening.
- Screening should continue as long as a woman is in good health and is expected to live 10 more years or longer.

Women should also know how their breasts normally look and feel and report any breast changes to a health care provider right away.

Women who are at higher risk for breast cancer should have a screening every year. When to start screening is based on your personal risk factors. Women may be at a higher risk for breast cancer when there is a family history of breast cancer, a previous breast biopsy with abnormal cells or dense breast tissue.

Talk with a health care provider about your risk for breast cancer and the best screening plan for you.

To learn more, or to schedule your mammogram online, visit www.PacMed.org/Breast-Health.