

Breast Density

What is dense breast tissue?

Dense breast tissue refers to the appearance of breast tissue on a mammogram. Breasts are made up of milk glands and milk ducts (glandular tissue), fibrous, and fatty tissue. When viewed on a mammogram, women with dense breasts have a lot of glandular or fibrous tissue and not much fat. Having dense breasts is common and is not abnormal.

Why is breast density important?

Dense breast tissue slightly increases your risk of getting breast cancer. It also makes it more difficult for doctors to see cancer on mammograms. This is because dense breast tissue looks white on a mammogram and breast masses or tumors also look white. Dense breast tissue can hide the masses or tumors.

How do I know if I have dense breasts?

Breast density cannot be felt. Breast density is determined by the radiologist who reads your mammogram. After you have had a mammogram, you will receive a letter from the radiologist with the results of your mammogram. If you have dense breasts, this may be included in the letter. Your health care provider can also tell you if you have dense breasts.

What should I do if I am notified that I have dense breasts?

Most importantly, you should realize it is NOT abnormal and actually is quite common. You should also consider discussing with your health care provider any questions you may have. Together you can decide if any additional tests are right for you based on your overall risk for breast cancer and your personal preference. Tests may include breast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), breast ultrasound or breast specific gamma imaging. Some insurance plans may not cover these tests. Check with your health insurance company to see what is covered.

If I have dense breasts, should I still get a mammogram?

Yes, a mammogram is the best first step for breast cancer screening. Whether you have dense breasts or almost entirely fatty breasts, it is important to get regular mammograms. Talk to your health care provider about when you should start being tested and how often.

