



Dense Breast Tissue and Your Mammogram

What is dense breast tissue?

Breasts contain a mix of 2 types of tissue that look different than each other on a mammogram. Fibroglandular tissue looks white, and fatty tissue looks black. Dense breasts have as much or more white tissue than black tissue. If a breast contains a cancerous area or harmless mass, both of these tissues will look white on the mammogram. The cancer or mass could be hidden by fibroglandular tissue. This can make it harder to read a mammogram of dense breasts.

Is dense breast tissue common?

Yes, it's normal and is linked to hormonal changes that occur over your lifetime. Breasts are more dense in your 30's and 40's. Breast density declines as you get older. Hormone therapy or other estrogen hormone treatment can stop or reverse the downward trend in density that normally occurs with aging.

Do I still need a mammogram if I have dense breasts?

Yes. A mammogram is your best option for detecting breast cancer. It's the only screening test proven to save lives by finding breast cancer early.

Do I need any other exams because I have dense breasts?

If your risk for breast cancer is average and you have dense breasts and your mammogram is normal, you won't need additional exams. But if your risk for breast cancer is high, your doctor may recommend additional exams.

What factors can increase my risk for breast cancer?

Your risk for breast cancer may be higher if you've:

- Had breast cancer or a biopsy that showed precancer cells.
- Tested positive for a breast cancer gene or have a first degree relative who tested positive.
- Had chest radiation therapy.

Your risk may also be higher if you have:

- A mother, daughter, or sister (first-degree relative) who had breast or ovarian cancer.
- An aunt, niece, grandmother, or granddaughter (second-degree relative) who had breast cancer before age 50 or ovarian cancer at any age.
- A family history of male breast cancer.

If your family medical history includes breast, ovarian, uterine, colon, or pancreatic cancer, ask your doctor whether you should see a genetic counselor. If you have genetic risk, there may be steps you can take to prevent cancer or detect it early.

Why am I learning about this now?

Breast density has always been one of the many factors that clinicians consider when reading a mammogram. The FDA (Food and Drug Administration) requires notifying all patients about their breast density. This encourages people to learn about breast density, including how it affects mammogram readings and breast cancer risk.

Learn more about dense breasts at kpdoc.org/breastdensity.



This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Some photos may include models and not actual patients.

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011061-330 (Revised 04/24) RL 6.6