

Breast Density and Your Mammogram Report

Regular mammograms are the best way to find breast cancer early. But if your mammogram report says that you have dense breast tissue, you may be wondering what that means.

What is dense breast tissue?

Breast density is a measure of how much fibrous and glandular tissue there is in your breast, as compared to fat tissue. It isn't related to breast size or firmness.

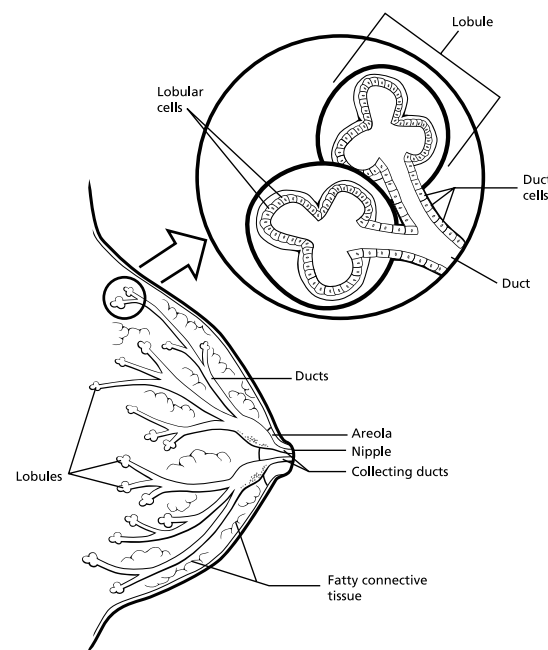
- Glandular tissue is made up of lobules and ducts. The lobules produce milk. The ducts carry the milk from the lobules to the nipple.
- Fibrous tissue and fat give breasts their size and shape and support the other structures.

Fibrous and glandular tissue are harder to see through on a mammogram, so your breast tissue may be called “dense” if you have a lot of these tissues (and not as much fat). Having dense breast tissue is common. Some women have more dense breasts than others.

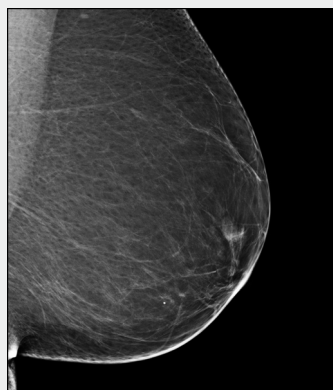
How do I know if I have dense breasts?

Your mammogram is reviewed by a radiologist, a doctor who “reads” mammograms. They check your mammogram for changes, and they also look at breast density.

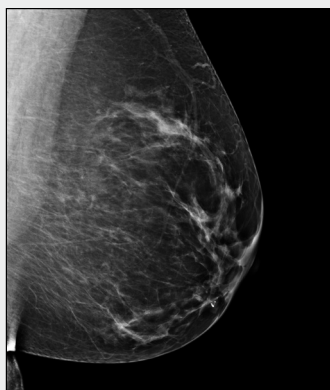
There are 4 types of breast density. They range from almost all fatty tissue to extremely dense tissue with very little fat. The radiologist decides which of the 4 types best describes how dense your breasts are. People whose breast density falls into categories C or D have dense breasts. About half of women in the US who have mammograms have dense breasts.



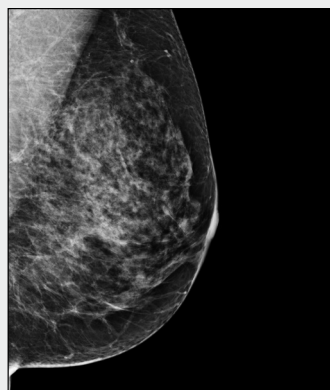
Breast density types



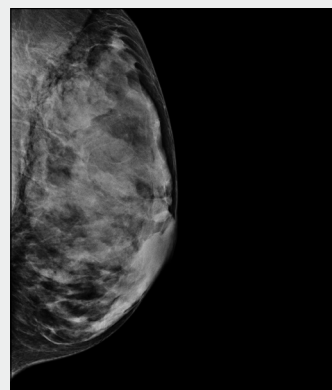
Category A: Breasts are almost all fatty tissue.



Category B: There are scattered areas of dense glandular and fibrous tissue (seen as white areas on the mammogram).



Category C: More of the breast is made of dense glandular and fibrous tissue. This can make it hard to see small tumors in or around the dense tissue, which also appear as white areas.



Category D: Breasts are extremely dense, which makes it hard to see masses or other findings that may appear as white areas on the mammogram.

Mammogram reports sent to women often mention breast density. Your health care provider can also tell you if your mammogram shows that you have dense breasts.

In many states, women whose mammograms show dense breasts must be told that they have dense breasts in the mammogram report they receive. Starting in mid-2024, all women must be told whether or not they have dense breasts and what this means for them.

Why is breast density important?

Women who have dense breasts have a higher risk of breast cancer than women with less dense breasts. It's unclear why dense breasts are linked to breast cancer risk. It may be that dense breasts have more cells that can change into cancer.

Dense breast tissue makes it harder for radiologists to see cancer on mammograms. Dense breast tissue looks white on a mammogram. Breast masses and cancers can also look white, so the dense tissue can make it harder to see them. Since fatty tissue looks almost black on mammograms, it's easier to see a tumor that looks white when most of the breast is fat.

If I have dense breasts, do I still need a mammogram?

Yes. Most breast cancers can be seen on a mammogram, even in women who have dense breasts. So, getting regular mammograms helps catch cancer early when it's easier to treat.

Even if your mammogram is normal, know how your breasts normally look and feel. And report any change to a health care provider right away.

Should I have any other screening tests if I have dense breast tissue?

Experts do not agree on whether other tests should be done along with mammograms in women with dense breasts.

Digital or 3D mammograms can find some cancers not seen on regular (2D) mammograms. Some studies suggest that 3D mammography might be helpful in women with dense breasts. It can be used as a screening test along with or instead of standard mammography. But not all imaging centers have this available yet.

Studies have shown that breast ultrasound and maybe magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) might help find some breast cancers that can't be seen on mammograms. But MRI and ultrasound can also show changes that are not cancer. This can lead to more tests and biopsies that might not be needed. And insurance may not cover the cost of ultrasound or MRI.

Talk to your health care provider about whether you should consider any of these tests.

What should I do if I have dense breast tissue?

If you have dense breasts, talk with your health care provider about what this means for you. Be sure that your doctor or nurse knows if there's anything in your medical history that may increase your risk for getting breast cancer.

People who are at higher risk for breast cancer, such as those with inherited gene mutations, a strong family history of breast cancer, or other factors, may need to get screened more often or have different tests done.

For cancer information and answers, call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345** or visit us online at [cancer.org](https://www.cancer.org). We're here when you need us.

