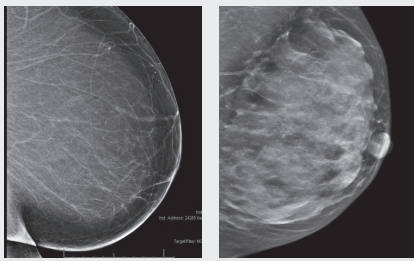


BREAST DENSITY

What Is Breast Density?



Nondense breast

Dense breast

Breast density refers to the appearance of a woman's breast on a mammogram. The more fibrous and glandular tissue in the breast and the less fat, the denser it appears on a mammogram. Radiologists—the physicians who interpret mammograms—classify breast density using four Breast Imaging Reporting and Data System (BI-RADS) breast density categories:

- Breasts are almost entirely fatty;
- There are scattered areas of dense fibrous and glandular tissue;
- There are more areas of dense fibrous and glandular tissue, making the breasts heterogeneously dense; and
- The breasts are extremely dense.

The last two categories are considered dense breasts.

Why Is Breast Density Important?

About 40 percent of women in their forties have dense breasts.

Women who have extremely dense breasts have a higher risk of developing breast cancer compared with women with less dense breast tissue. However, having extremely dense breasts is just one risk factor for breast cancer, and researchers are working to incorporate this factor into risk prediction models to help better determine a woman's risk for the disease.

Because dense breast tissue and breast cancers both look white on mammograms, dense breast tissue can make it harder to see breast cancer on a mammogram. Thus, dense breast tissue can reduce the effectiveness of mammograms.

Many U.S. states have enacted legislation mandating that women who have a mammogram be informed about breast density in general or about whether they have dense breasts. However, there currently is no consensus about what other breast cancer screening tests, if any, women with dense breasts should get in addition to mammograms. Thus, a woman informed that she has dense breasts should talk to her health care provider about whether additional testing with breast tomosynthesis, ultrasound, or magnetic resonance imaging is right for her.