

# BREAST DENSITY

## What Is Breast Density?

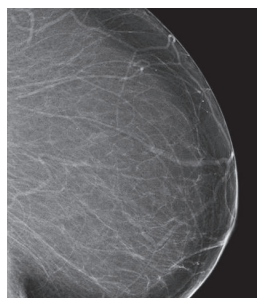
A woman's breast consists of fibrous tissue, which holds the breast in place; glandular tissue, which makes milk; and adipose tissue (fat), which fills the space between fibrous and glandular tissues. Breast density reflects the comparative amounts of fibrous, glandular, and adipose tissues in the breast, as imaged by a mammogram. The higher the amount of fibrous and glandular tissue in the breast and the less fat, the denser the breast tissue appears in the mammogram. Radiologists—the physicians who interpret mammograms—classify breast density using four Breast Imaging Reporting and Data System (BI-RADS) categories:

- The breasts are almost entirely fatty (about 10 percent of women).
- There are few scattered areas of dense fibrous and glandular tissue (about 40 percent of women).
- The breasts are evenly dense throughout (about 40 percent of women).
- The breasts are extremely dense (about 10 percent of women).

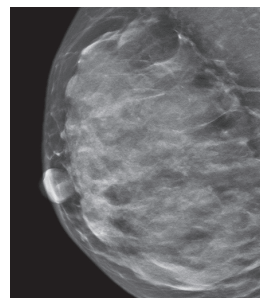
The last two categories are considered dense breasts.

## Why Is Breast Density Important?

About half of women in their forties have dense breasts. Women with dense breasts are at a higher risk of developing breast cancer compared to women with less dense breast tissue. Furthermore, dense breast tissue, like breast cancer, appears white on mammograms, thus reducing their effectiveness in distinguishing tumor from normal tissue. It is



**Nondense breast**



**Dense breast**

important to note that dense breasts are only one of many risk factors for breast cancer. Ongoing research is focused on understanding why women with dense breasts are at higher risk of developing breast cancer, and whether this knowledge can be used to improve breast cancer risk prediction models. Because of our gaps in knowledge, there is currently no consensus on whether women whose breasts appear dense on mammograms should get additional, if any, breast cancer screening tests.

## What Should One Do If One Is Diagnosed with Dense Breasts?

Many U.S. states have enacted legislation requiring health care providers to inform women about breast density in general, or about whether they have dense breasts following a mammogram. Women with dense breasts should talk to their health care providers about whether additional testing with breast tomosynthesis, ultrasound, or magnetic resonance imaging is right for them.