

# Breast Density and Your Mammogram Report

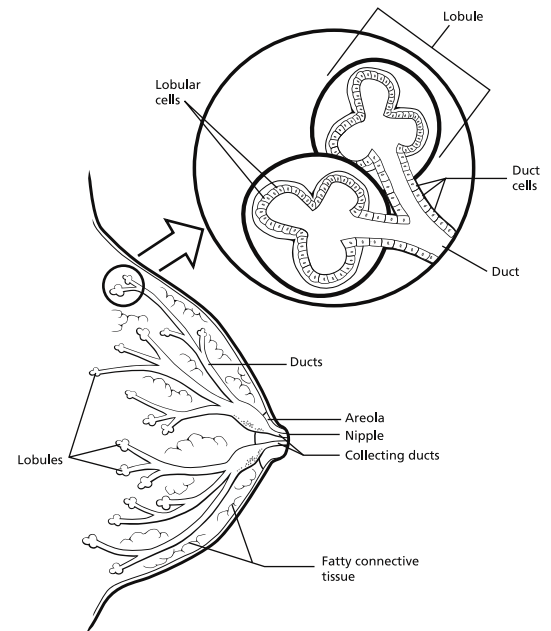
Regular mammograms are the best way to find breast cancer early. But if your mammogram report says that you have dense breast tissue, you may be wondering what that means.

## 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. Breasts are made up of lobules, ducts, and fatty and fibrous connective tissue.

- Lobules are the small glands that produce milk, while ducts are the tiny tubes that carry the milk from the lobules to the nipple. Together, the lobules and ducts are referred to as glandular tissue.
- Fibrous tissue and fat give breasts their size and shape and hold the other structures in place.

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, and some women have more dense breast tissue than others. For most women, breasts become less dense with age. But in some women, there's little change.



## How do I know if I have dense breasts?

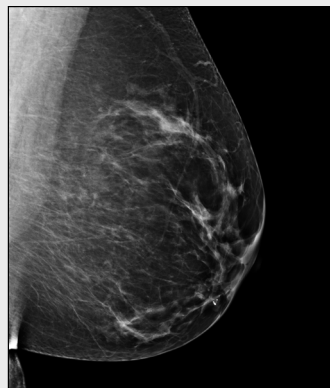
Your mammogram will be reviewed by a radiologist, a doctor who “reads” mammograms. They will check your mammogram for abnormal areas, and they will also look at breast density.

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.

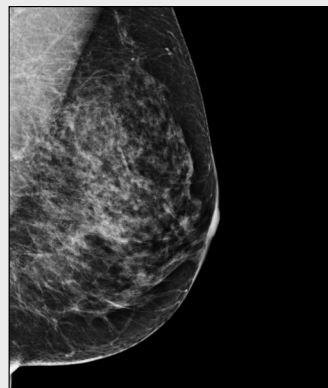
## Breast density types



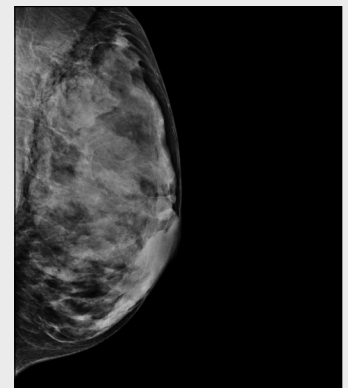
**Category A:** Breasts are almost all fatty tissue.



**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 or extremely dense breasts (which includes about half of all women) must be told that they have dense breasts in the summary of the mammogram report they receive.

## Why is breast density important?

Women who have dense breast tissue have a higher risk of breast cancer compared to women with less dense breast tissue. It's unclear at this time why dense breast tissue is linked to breast cancer risk. It may be that dense breast tissue has more cells that can develop into abnormal cells.

Dense breast tissue makes it harder for radiologists to see cancer on mammograms. Dense (fibrous and glandular) 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 breast tissue. So, it's still important to get regular mammograms because they can help save women's lives.

Even if you have a normal mammogram report, you should know how your breasts normally look and feel. Anytime there's a change, you should report it to a health care provider right away.

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

At this time, experts do not agree on what other tests, if any, should be done in addition to mammograms in women with dense breasts.

Digital breast tomosynthesis (3D mammography) can find some cancers not seen on regular (2D) mammograms. Some studies have suggested 3D mammography might be particularly helpful in women with dense breasts. It can be used as a screening test along with or instead of standard mammography, although it isn't yet available at all imaging centers.

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

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 your mammogram report says that you have dense breast tissue, 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, day-to-day help, and support, call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345** or visit us online at **cancer.org**. We're here when you need us.

