

Breast Density and Breast Cancer Risk: Is an Annual Mammogram Enough?

If your healthcare provider has told you that you have dense breast tissue, you're not alone. Dense breasts are a common finding during a mammogram. In fact, nearly half of all women aged 40 and over who have mammograms are told they have dense breasts.¹

While dense breasts are normal, it's important for women to understand the risks associated with dense breasts, so you can have an informed discussion with your healthcare provider and create a screening plan that works best for you.

Let's take a look at some of the common myths and misperceptions about dense breasts and breast cancer screening, so you can stay informed.

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Myth: Since dense breasts are so common, I don't need to think about my breast density.

Truth: Dense breasts can make it harder to detect cancer. During a mammogram, your healthcare provider is looking for tumors, which appear as solid white areas.² Because dense breast tissue also appears white, it can hide or "mask" potential tumors.¹ This can lead to missed or underdiagnosed cancers, which is a primary driver for breast cancer mortality.³

Additionally, having dense breasts can increase your risk of developing breast cancer.¹ Women with extremely dense breasts are four to six times more likely to develop breast cancer.⁴

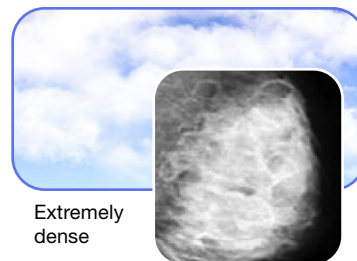
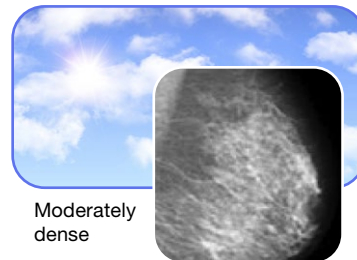
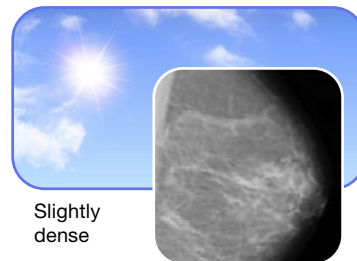
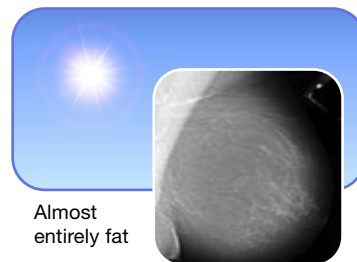
Myth: An annual mammogram will detect all breast cancers, even if I have dense breasts.

Truth: Mammograms miss up to 40% of cancers in women with dense breasts.⁴ For women with increased breast density, the American Society of Breast Surgeons recommends considering breast MRI or ultrasound in addition to annual mammography beginning at age 40.^{5,6}

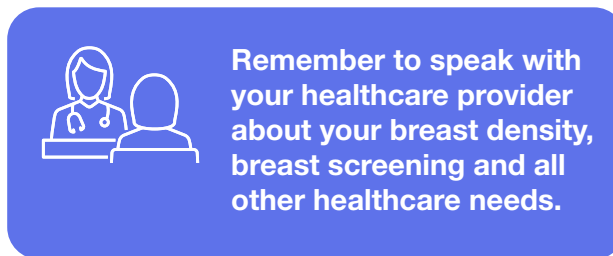
Myth: A mammogram is the only option for breast cancer screening in women with dense breasts.

Truth: For women with dense breasts, other tests such as an ultrasound or a breast MRI, in addition to a mammogram, can help detect breast cancer.⁵

Dense breast tissue acts like clouds, making the sun harder to see in the sky.



Breast density is one of several risk factors for breast cancer, alongside your genetic profile and family history. Talk to your healthcare provider about your overall risk and to determine if supplemental screening, such as breast MRI, is right for you.



To learn more about breast density and its relation to breast cancer, visit [UnderstandYourDensity.com](https://www.understandyourdensity.com).



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2. Dense breast tissue: What it means to have dense breasts. Mayo Clinic <https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/mammogram/in-depth/dense-breasttissue/art-20123968>. Updated July 22, 2021. Accessed August 18, 2021.
3. Kuhl, C. K. (2019). Underdiagnosis is the main challenge in breast cancer screening. *The Lancet Oncology*, 20(8), 1044–1046. doi: 10.1016/s1470-2045(19)30314-6
4. An Introduction to Dense Breast Tissue. DenseBreast-Info.org. <https://densebreast-info.org/introduction-to-dense-breast-tissue>. Accessed August 18, 2021.
5. The American Society of Breast Surgeons - Position Statement on Screening Mammography. (2019). <https://www.breastsurgeons.org/docs/statements/Position-Statement-on-Screening-Mammography.pdf>. Accessed August 18, 2021.
6. Monticciolo DL. Et. al. Breast Cancer Screening in Women at Higher-Than-Average Risk: Recommendations From the ACR. *J Am Coll Radiol*. 2018;15:408-414.