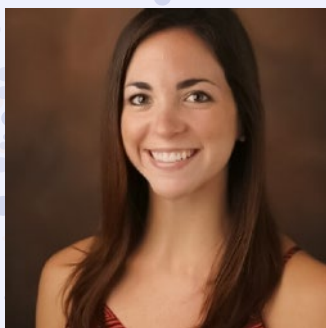


Tips for Talking to Your Healthcare Provider About Dense Breasts and Your Breast Cancer Screening Needs

If you've recently received a letter from your healthcare provider informing you that you have dense breasts, you're not alone.

Nearly half of all women aged 40 and over who have mammograms are told they have dense breasts.¹ Having dense breasts can increase your risk of breast cancer. In fact, for women with the densest breasts, the risk for breast cancer can be four to six times higher than women with the least dense breasts.² However, recent survey results from Bayer show 30 percent of women do not feel informed about how breast density impacts breast cancer risk or long-term breast cancer screening needs.³

Given this information, you may be wondering what you should do next. This discussion guide will help you and your healthcare provider have an honest and helpful conversation about breast density, its relation to breast cancer risk, and how it may impact your breast screening plans.



A Message from a Women's Health Nurse Practitioner

My name is Stefani Yudas, NP, and I am a Women's Health Nurse Practitioner who has specialized in breast health for nearly 7 years. Working in a breast specialty clinic, I have a firsthand experience of the impact breast health education can have on women. I have had countless discussions with women regarding breast density.

For women who have mammograms, there can often be confusion and anxiety surrounding breast density, including what

it means, and how it may affect their own risk of developing breast cancer. Dense breast notification laws have enabled women to be informed of their breast density with the intent to encourage a conversation with their healthcare providers.

This discussion guide provides an opportunity to empower women to feel confident in their breast cancer screening and move forward together with their healthcare provider as an informed team.

What Does It Mean to Have Dense Breasts?

Dense breast tissue is seen only on a mammogram and appears as a white solid area that is hard to see through.⁴ Breast density is not based on how your breasts feel and it has nothing to do with breast size or firmness.

Mammograms can miss up to 40% of cancers in women with dense breasts.²

To determine your level of breast density, the radiologist who interprets your mammogram will calculate the amount of dense tissue in your breasts and classify it into one of four groups.⁵

Breast Density Increases Breast Cancer Risk

Breast density is a lesser-known risk factor for breast cancer. However, it should be considered in your risk

assessment in addition to other more widely known risk factors such as family history or genetic profile.⁶

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.⁴ 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.⁷

In addition to making it harder to spot cancer on a mammogram, having dense breasts can increase your overall risk of developing breast cancer.²

If I Have Dense Breasts, Do I Need Supplemental Imaging Beyond a Mammogram?

Mammograms can miss up to 40% of cancers in women with dense breasts.² Therefore, many breast specialists recommend adding supplemental screening tests along with mammography for certain women with dense breasts, which may include:

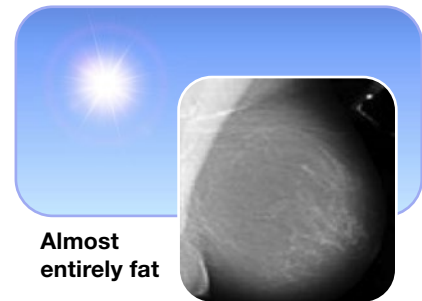
- **Breast Ultrasound** uses sound waves to produce pictures of the internal structures of the breast and analyze tissue.⁸
- **Contrast Enhanced Mammography** is a type of mammogram that uses a special dye, called a contrast agent, that is injected into a vein before the mammogram images are taken.⁹
- **Breast MRI** (magnetic resonance imaging) uses radio waves and strong magnets to make detailed pictures of the inside of the breast.¹⁰

A breast MRI has the potential to see lumps and tumors a mammogram might miss. It may also be able to detect breast cancer at earlier stages.²

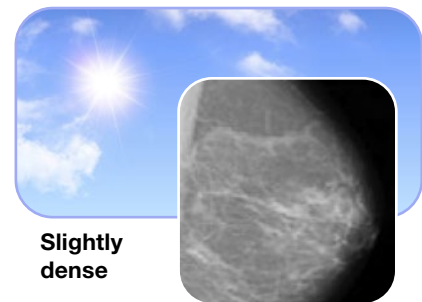
For women with increased breast density, the American Society of Breast Surgeons recommends considering breast MRI or ultrasound in addition to annual mammography beginning at age 40.^{11,12}

4 CATEGORIES OF BREAST DENSITY

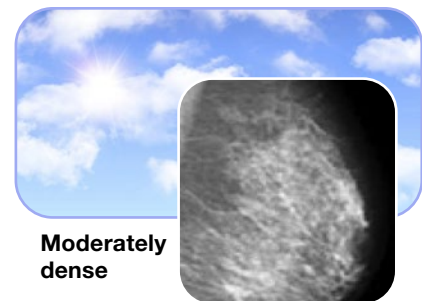
Dense breast tissue acts like clouds, making the sun harder to see in the sky.



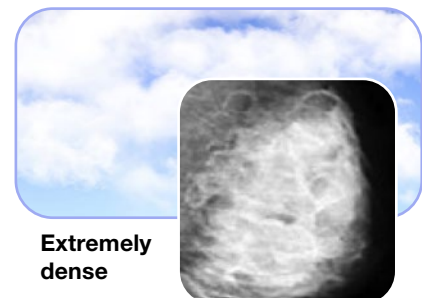
Almost entirely fat



Slightly dense



Moderately dense



Extremely dense



Individuals depicted in this photograph are actors and not actual healthcare providers or patients.

Supplemental imaging is often recommended based off a thorough risk evaluation, including breast density, your genetic profile, and your family history. Your personal preferences and additional costs should also be a part of the decision-making process. While these supplemental tests can detect more cancers, they can also lead to findings which require additional work-up such as further imaging or biopsy, but ultimately may turn out to be benign.

Talking to Your Healthcare Provider After Learning You Have Dense Breasts

If you've been told you have dense breasts—whether in person or in a letter from your healthcare provider—you may be confused about what to do next. If you didn't receive any advice on next steps, a conversation with your healthcare provider is a good place to start.

Here are some topics to discuss:

- How dense are my breasts? Do I fall within a specific breast density category?
- What does this mean for my personal breast cancer risk?
- Depending on a woman's breast density category, potential tumors may be missed on mammograms. What are your thoughts on this?
- Do I need supplemental screening beyond an annual mammogram?
- What if I also have other known risk factors, such as family history, in addition to having dense breasts?
- If I need supplemental screening, what are the most appropriate imaging procedures for my personal breast density category, personal history, and other medical considerations?
- Will supplemental screening be covered by my insurance?

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

A Note to Healthcare Providers



A breast MRI has the potential to see tumors a mammogram might miss and may be able to detect breast cancer at earlier stages.² It's important to balance the benefits of supplemental screening with the burden it may place on your patients, including additional costs, time off work and childcare for screening appointments, and potentially unnecessary anxiety and worry.

Organizations such as the National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health (www.npwh.org) and DenseBreast-info.org have resources and support that can help you and your patients make the most informed decisions about supplemental screening needs for women with dense breasts.

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