



Breast Density and Breast Cancer Screening

What is breast density?

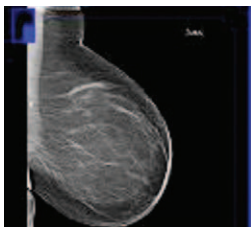
Breasts are made up of fibrous, glandular, and fatty tissue. Dense breasts have a lot of fibrous or glandular tissue and less fatty tissue. Breast density may change over time and is not related to how hard or soft breasts feel during a physical exam.

Why is breast density important?

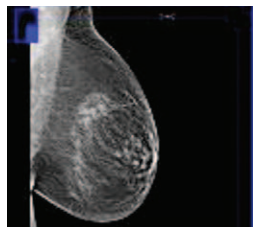
Dense breasts are more difficult to screen with a mammogram. Dense breast tissue appears white on mammograms (see images below) but so do many lumps, both cancerous and benign. This means abnormalities can “hide” within the image of the tissue. Some research shows that women with dense breast tissue may have a higher chance of getting breast cancer.

How do I know if I have dense breasts?

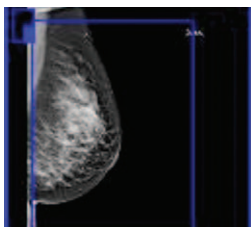
A radiologist reviewing your mammogram will assign a breast density score from 1 - 4 (see images below). Your mammogram results will say if you have dense breasts.



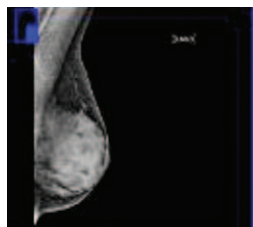
Score 1: Mostly fatty



Score 2: Scattered fibroglandular density



Score 3: Dense in some areas



Score 4: Extremely dense

If I have dense breasts, do I still need a mammogram?

Yes. A mammogram is the only medical imaging screening proven to reduce deaths from breast cancer. Most cancers are seen on mammograms, including in women with dense breasts. Nine in 10 women with early stage breast cancer can be cured with proper treatment. Regardless of breast density, Sutter Health recommends all women age 40 and older discuss with their doctor when they should start having routine mammograms.

Are there other tests besides a mammogram to check for cancer?

Several other tests may help find cancers that are not seen on mammograms: ultrasound, breast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and tomosynthesis. For women who have risk factors for breast cancer in addition to dense breasts, any of these three tests may be useful.

Additional imaging beyond mammography has not been proven to find cancers at an earlier stage or to prevent breast cancer deaths. Women with additional risk factors for breast cancer may benefit from additional imaging studies. Talk with your doctor about your risks and the next steps that are right for you.

What should I do?

Regardless of breast density, Sutter Health recommends all women age 40 and older should discuss with their doctor when to start having routine mammograms, and then follow those recommendations. Women with additional risk factors or concerns should talk with their doctor. Together, you can determine if other screening tests are right for you. *Availability of tests may vary.*

How can I lower my chances of getting breast cancer?

- Do—exercise regularly, eat a healthy diet and maintain a normal weight
- Don't—smoke or drink more than one alcoholic beverage each day (on average)