

What Does It Mean if You Have Dense Breasts?

Did your last mammogram report say you have dense breasts? It's more common than you think. Almost half of all women who get mammograms are found to have dense breasts, and many don't know what it means.

Understanding Dense Breast Tissue

Breast density describes the different kinds of tissue that show on your mammogram. Your breasts are made of fat, connective tissue, and milk ducts and lobules that together are called glandular tissue. Dense breasts have higher amounts of glandular and connective tissue and lower amounts of fatty tissue. Women with dense breasts have a higher risk for breast cancer than women with fatty breasts.

If you have dense breasts, speak with your provider about your personal risk factors for breast cancer and whether you should have more screening tests, such as 3D mammography, a breast ultrasound or a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) exam.



3D Test May Catch More Cancers

Conventional mammograms use an X-ray to take two-dimensional pictures of the breast. Many are digital, similar to a digital camera. This makes the results easy for doctors to magnify the images for a closer look. It may also reduce the need for follow-up tests.



A newer test—called tomosynthesis—takes digital mammograms one step further. The test takes multiple images from many angles. A computer puts them together to make a 3D image of each breast. The technology has many potential advantages. In one study, cancer was detected more often in 3D scans. Women who had the 3D test were also less likely to need follow-up tests.

What's the Right Screening for You?

No one option is right for everyone. Traditional mammograms are still effective. And experts say more studies are needed to determine if tomosynthesis is more effective than traditional mammograms.

Until then, talk with your healthcare provider about your breast cancer risk and screening plan. The earlier you catch breast cancer, the easier it is to treat.

