

Frequently Asked Questions

What are dense breasts?

Fibrous tissue and fat give breasts their shape. Breasts are called dense when a [mammogram](#) shows more fibrous tissue and less fat.

[\[Mammography and Other Screening Tests for Breast Problems\]](#)

Do dense breasts feel different?

Dense breasts don't feel any different than breasts with more fatty tissue. This means you can't tell if you have dense breasts on your own or with a clinical breast exam.

How do I know if I have dense breasts?

[Mammograms](#) can show if breasts are dense. Your mammogram report should say if your breasts are dense or not dense. Talk with your doctor if you have questions about your mammogram report or you haven't received it.

Are dense breasts normal?

Dense breasts are normal and common, especially among younger women. Almost half of women age 40 and older who get mammograms are found to have dense breasts.

What causes breasts to be dense?

Breast density can be genetic, meaning that it runs in families. Other factors may include having a low [body mass index \(BMI\)](#) and using [hormone therapy](#) after menopause.

How is breast density measured?

[Radiologists](#) sort breast density into four categories:

1. Almost entirely fat
2. Some dense areas, but mostly fat
3. Some fatty areas, but mostly dense
4. Extremely dense

Breasts in category 3 or 4 are considered dense. The radiologist reading the mammogram chooses the category based on their expert opinion. Your mammogram report should say if the radiologist considers your breasts dense or not dense.

How does breast density affect mammography?

Dense breast tissue and cancerous lumps both look white on a mammogram. This can make it harder for the radiologist to read the mammogram and identify cancers.

Read [Mammography and Other Screening Tests for Breast Problems](#) for more information on [mammography](#) .

Does breast density affect cancer risk?

Women with dense breasts have a modestly higher risk of breast cancer than women without dense breasts. The risk increases as breast density increases. Dense breasts do not increase the risk of dying from breast cancer.

Do I need extra breast cancer screenings if I have dense breasts?

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not recommend extra screenings if you have dense breasts and no other risk factors. This is because research does not show that extra or different screening methods reduce breast cancer deaths in these cases.

Some states require health care professionals to discuss extra screenings if you have dense breasts. Talk with your [obstetrician–gynecologist \(ob-gyn\)](#) about your risk for breast cancer and your screening needs. Extra screenings may be needed if you are at high risk of breast cancer.

Glossary

Body Mass Index (BMI): A number calculated from height and weight. BMI is used to determine whether a person is underweight, normal weight, overweight, or obese.

Hormone Therapy: Treatment in which estrogen and often progestin are taken to help relieve symptoms that may happen around the time of menopause.

Mammogram: An X-ray image used to show breast cancer or other breast problems.

Mammography: X-rays of the breast that are used to find breast cancer or other breast problems.

Obstetrician–Gynecologist (Ob-Gyn): A doctor with special training and education in women’s health.

Radiologists: Physicians who specialize in interpreting images taken with various medical imaging techniques.

If you have further questions, contact your ob-gyn.

Don't have an ob-gyn? [Learn how to find a doctor near you.](#)

FAQ514

Last updated: April 2023

Last reviewed: April 2023

Copyright 2024 by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. All rights reserved. Read [copyright and permissions information.](#)

This information is designed as an educational aid for the public. It offers current information and opinions related to women's health. It is not intended as a statement of the standard of care. It does not explain all of the proper treatments or methods of care. It is not a substitute for the advice of a physician. Read [ACOG's complete disclaimer](#).

About ACOG

Disclaimer

Contact Us

How to Find an Ob-Gyn



Copyright 2024 American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Privacy Statement

|

Terms and Conditions of Use