



Breast Density News Bulletin

What is it?

Breast density is not a measurement of how breasts feel, but rather how they appear on a mammogram. Breasts are made up of fatty and non-fatty (glandular or fibrous) tissue. Dense breasts have a lot of non-fatty tissue and not much fat.

How do I know if I have dense breasts?

Breast density is determined by the Radiologist that reads your mammogram. As of June 1, 2015, Radiologists are required to include breast density in the report that they send to your doctor after your mammogram.

Why is breast density important?

Having dense breasts increases a woman's risk for breast cancer in two ways. It increases a woman's overall risk for developing cancer and it makes it more difficult to see cancer on a mammogram. Both benign and cancerous masses appear white on a mammogram, as does non-fatty breast tissue.

What should I do if I have dense breasts?

If your radiology report indicates that your breasts are dense, your doctor will help you to determine your lifetime breast cancer risk based on other risk factors that you may have.

If your doctor finds that you are at low risk for developing breast cancer, then you simply need to be sure to have your yearly screening mammogram. Many cancers are seen on mammograms even if you have dense breasts.

If your breasts are dense and your doctor finds that you are in a high risk category for developing breast cancer in your lifetime, he or she may order other screening tests (such as a breast MRI) in addition to your annual mammogram.

Should I have a breast MRI if my breasts are dense regardless of other risk factors?

The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) does not recommend additional screening tests for women who are at low risk for breast cancer. Additional tests, such as the MRI, show more findings that are not cancer and lead to more testing and biopsies. Additional screening tests may not be covered by your insurance.

What should I do if I still have questions?

Please call the office of the provider that ordered your mammogram. This may be your primary care physician or an Alliance provider. Our office number is 517-484-3000.