

Dense Breast Tissue and Breast Cancer Screening FAQs

What is dense breast tissue?

Breasts are made up of a mixture of fibrous tissue, glandular tissue and fatty tissue. Your breasts are considered dense if you have a large proportion of fibrous or glandular tissue and not much fatty tissue. Dense tissue may decrease with age, but there is little, if any, change in most women.

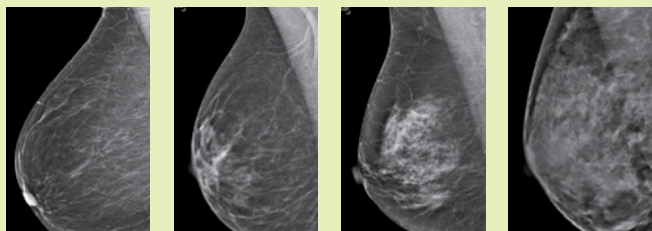
Why is dense breast tissue important?

Dense tissue may hide or obscure some signs of cancer. Breast cancer may look like a white spot on a mammogram and dense tissue also looks white on a mammogram. So, small white spots are not as easy to detect in areas of the mammogram that show a background of dense or white tissue.

How do I know if I have dense tissue?

Breast density is determined by the radiologist who reads your mammogram. Having dense tissue does not necessarily mean that your breasts are lumpy, thick, heavy or cystic. The radiologist sees the density when he or she reads your mammogram. There are 4 categories used to describe the amount of dense tissue seen on the mammogram.

Radiologists classify breast density using a 4-level density scale:



Almost entirely fatty

Scattered areas of fibroglandular density

Heterogeneously dense

Extremely dense

Density Scale:

A - Almost entirely fatty

B - Scattered areas of fibroglandular density

C - Heterogeneously dense

D - Extremely Dense

Your density category will be on your mammogram report that is sent to your doctor. Breast Center of Acadiana will also notify you of your density category and advise you if another test, screening breast ultrasound, is recommended.

If I have dense tissue should I still have a mammogram?

The mammogram is still important and valuable because even when there is dense tissue it may show some signs of early breast cancer, such as calcifications, better than other tests.

So what can be done if I have dense tissue?

For women with dense tissue, category C or D, we offer another screening test, screening breast ultrasound, in addition to the mammogram. This will improve the ability to detect breast cancer that may be hidden on the mammogram.

What if my tissue is not dense?

If your breast tissue is not dense, category A or B, the mammogram is all that is necessary for yearly screening.

