

Are you Dense?

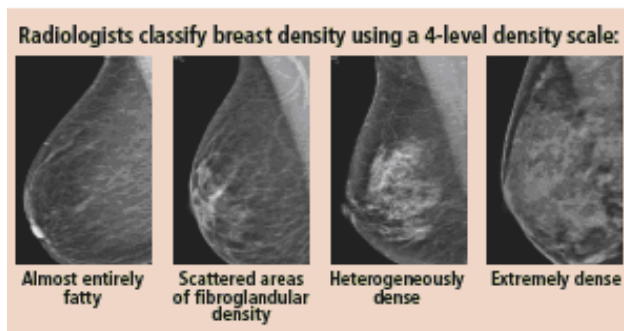
Breast density can make it difficult to detect cancer during routine mammograms. Governor Chris Christie signed the inform/insurance bill, S792, into law on January 23, 2014, requiring mammography reports provided to patients to include information about breast density. In addition to notification, S-792 also requires insurers to cover supplemental examinations in women with **extremely dense** breast tissue. The law makes New Jersey the 14th state to enact some form of breast density notification legislation.

What is breast density?

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

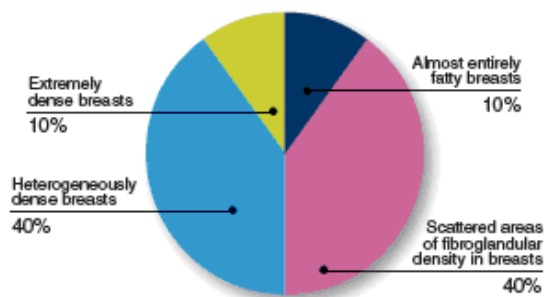
How do I know if I have dense breasts?

Breast density is determined by the radiologist who reads your mammogram. There are four categories of mammographic density. The radiologist assigns each mammogram to one of the categories. Your doctor should be able to tell you whether you have dense breasts based on where you fall on the density scale. (See scale below.)



Breast density in the U.S. (See pie chart)

- 10% of women have almost entirely fatty breasts
- 10% have extremely dense breasts
- 80% are classified into one of two middle categories



Why is breast density important?

Having dense breast tissue may increase your risk of getting breast cancer. Dense breasts also make it more difficult for doctors to spot cancer on mammograms. Dense tissue appears white on a mammogram. Lumps, both benign and cancerous, also appear white. So, mammograms can be less accurate in women with dense breasts.

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

Yes. A mammogram is the only medical imaging screening test proven to reduce breast cancer deaths. Many cancers are seen on mammograms even if you have dense breast tissue.

Are there any tests that are better than a mammogram for dense breasts?

In breasts that are dense, cancer can be hard to see on a mammogram. Studies have shown that **ultrasound** and **magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)** can help find breast cancers that can't be seen on a mammogram. These are supplemental examinations intended to be used in conjunction with mammography to increase the ability to detect breast cancer in **extremely dense** breast parenchyma.

What should I do if I have dense breasts? What if I don't?

If you have dense breasts, please talk to your doctor. Together, you can decide which, if any, additional screening exams are right for you.

If your breasts are not dense, other factors may still place you at increased risk for breast cancer — including a family history of the disease, previous chest radiation treatment for cancer and previous breast biopsies that show you are high risk. Talk to your doctor and discuss your history.

Even if you are at low risk, and have entirely fatty breasts, you should still get an annual mammogram starting at age 40.

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