BREAST DENSITY

What Health Care Providers Should Know

Breasts are made up of lobules, ducts, and fatty and fibrous connective tissue. Breasts are seen as dense if they have a lot of fibrous or glandular tissue and not much fatty tissue.

Four levels of breast density:

1. Almost entirely fatty – breasts are almost entirely composed of fat. About 10 percent of all women have breasts considered to be "fatty."
2. Scattered areas of fibro-glandular density – there are some scattered areas of density, but most of the breast tissue is not dense. About 40 percent of all women have breasts with scattered fibro-glandular tissue.
3. Heterogeneously dense – there are some areas of non-dense tissue, but most of the breast tissue is dense. About 40 percent of all women have heterogeneously dense breasts.
4. Extremely dense – nearly all the breast tissue is dense. About 10 percent of all women have extremely dense breasts.

   Breasts which are heterogeneously dense or extremely dense are considered "dense breasts."

- The tissue composition of every breast is different and can differ during a woman's lifetime. Women should know their breast density and understand the limitations of mammography for their breast type.

- Dense breasts make it more difficult for doctors to see cancer on mammograms. While fat appears black on a mammogram, both cancer and dense breast tissue appear white. Therefore it is harder to detect a cancer within an area of dense tissue.

- Women with dense breasts should still have mammography screening.

- Discuss breast cancer risks with women to decide if additional breast imaging tests would be beneficial, based on their overall risk factors.

- If it is determined that she would benefit from additional imaging, the following tests may be recommended: 3-D mammogram, breast ultrasound, or breast MRI.

WOMEN'S WAY
A Breast & Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program

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