



ASK THE DOCTOR: BREAST DENSITY ON YOUR MAMMOGRAM

Dr. Susan Kutner, MD

Chair, Breast Care Task Force Kaiser Permanente Northern California

What does it mean to have dense breasts?

Breasts are a mix of different types of tissue that show differently on a mammogram. Fibrous and glandular tissue looks “white” and fatty tissue looks “black.” Dense breasts have more “white” and less “black” than average. This makes it harder to interpret a mammogram.

Why am I learning about this now?

California law now requires that all women who have dense breasts be notified. Breast density is not a new discovery. It has always been one of the things that we look at when reading a mammogram.

Is it common to have dense breasts?

Many women have dense breasts; this is normal. It will change over a woman’s lifetime as hormone levels change. Most women in their 40s have dense breasts. By the age of 60, only one-third of women have dense breasts. Estrogen exposure, such as hormone replacement therapy, will increase your breast density. Dense breasts also runs in families.

How often should I have a mammogram?

Mammography is still the only screening test that has been proven to save lives by finding breast cancer early. We recommend that women ages 40 to 49 at average risk of developing breast cancer should consider the risks and benefits of routine mammogram screening before deciding. Women ages 50 to 74 should get mammograms every 1 to 2 years.

What are other risk factors for breast cancer?

- Personal history of breast cancer.
- First-degree relative (mother, daughter, or sister) with breast cancer.
- You or a first-degree relative tested positive for a breast cancer gene.
- Second-degree (aunt, niece, grandmother, granddaughter) relative with breast cancer before age 50.
- First- or second-degree relative with ovarian cancer.
- Prior chest radiation therapy.

Do I need more tests?

If you need more tests, we will contact you directly to set this up at your earliest convenience.

For more information on breast health, including screening guidelines, go to kpdoc.org/breastdensity.

HEALTH EDUCATION



This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.

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