

## Are there special screening recommendations for Black, Hispanic, and Asian people?

No, the questions and answers above apply to all women and transgender men with breasts. White populations are slightly more likely to develop breast cancer. Black people are more likely to develop more aggressive, advanced stage breast cancer often diagnosed at a younger age. Having a risk assessment by age 30 and beginning mammography screening by age 40 (depending upon provider recommendation) are good practices for all.

### Where can I find additional information?

Your breast imaging radiologist or referring health care provider can answer questions about your specific screening needs and any recommendations that have been made.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic\\_info/dense-breasts.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic_info/dense-breasts.htm)

Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH)

Office of Women's Health and Family Services

<https://www.dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/life-stages-populations/womens-health-services>

Women's Health-Line 888-522-1282

Illinois Emergency Management Agency and Office of Homeland Security (IEMA OHS)

<https://iemaohs.illinois.gov/info/publications.html>

American Cancer Society

[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

American College of Radiology

[www.acr.org](http://www.acr.org)



State of Illinois

Illinois Department of Public Health

# Breast Density

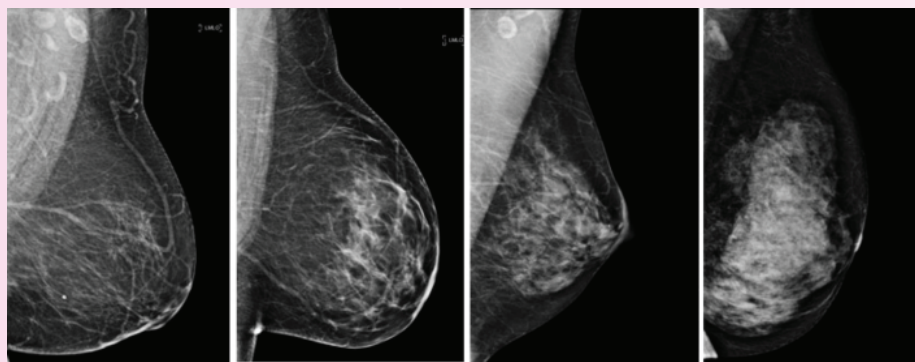
## What You Need To Know?



We thank you for having your screening mammogram. You are making an important step to caring for your health. You may have heard about breast density in the media or from friends, family, and co-workers. The state of Illinois supports breast health, and Illinois law requires that you be informed if your mammogram shows that your breasts are dense. We would like to answer some frequently asked questions about breast density.

## What is breast density?

Breasts contain two types of normal tissue. The two types look very different on mammograms: one type the breast is fat and looks dark gray or nearly black, and with the other type the breast tissue is light gray, nearly white. When a large area of the breast has a white appearance, the breast will be called dense. When nearly the entire breast has a dark appearance, the breast will be called fatty. Most women have combinations of fatty and dense breast tissue. The four mammograms below show normal breasts progressing from a fatty appearance (left picture A) and continue to an extremely dense breast (right picture D).



A. Fatty

B. Scattered

C. Heterogeneously  
dense

D. Extremely  
dense

A and B are not dense

C and D are dense

## How do I know if I have dense breasts? Is mammography the only way?

Yes, a mammogram is the only way to know if your breasts are dense. A breast exam by your health care provider cannot give you this information nor can examining your own breasts. The size and shape of your breasts will not tell you their density. Your mammograms will show the type of breast tissue you have and, if your breast tissue is dense, you will be told on the letter you receive with the results of your mammogram.

## If dense breasts are normal and common, why is it important for me to know about breast density?

*Two reasons:*

1. People with dense breasts may have a higher chance of developing breast cancer when added to other risk factors. About 40% of women over the age of 40 have dense breasts.
2. Because cancers are white and dense breast tissue is white, cancers may be more difficult to find on mammograms of people with dense breasts.

## If cancers are harder to find on my mammograms because I have dense breasts, is there anything I can do?

**Yes, continue to have mammograms!**

Mammography is the only breast cancer screening exam proven to reduce deaths related to breast cancer. Most lives are saved if people at average risk of developing breast cancer are screened with mammograms every year beginning at age 40 (depending upon provider recommendations).

## 3D Mammography

Even in dense breasts, many cancers can be seen on mammograms. A newer type of mammography called digital breast tomosynthesis (DBT) or 3D mammography takes multiple thin images of the breast. These low dose thin images can help uncover many hidden masses but not all. If it is available, 3D mammography is the better option for your mammography screening, especially if your breasts are dense.

Other imaging exams in addition to mammograms that can find cancers not seen on mammograms may be recommended by your breast imaging radiologist or other health care providers along with your screening mammograms – ultrasound (US) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). Both US and MRI can “see through” dense breast tissue.

**Ultrasound (US)** uses sound waves, not X-rays, to picture the breasts and other organs. Dense breast tissue looks white on both US and mammography, but cancers and other masses that look white on mammograms will look dark on US where they are easier to see. No dyes (also called contrast agents) are needed.

**Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)** uses strong magnetic fields and radio waves, not X-rays, to look at the tissue within the breast and many other organs. To look for cancers in the breast, a dye (a gadolinium compound) is injected into a vein. Cancers and some non-cancerous masses will “enhance” or appear brighter on the images. Of all the breast imaging methods, MRI finds the most cancers. For people with the highest risk of developing breast cancer, screening with both mammography and MRI is recommended. MRI may be recommended when the breast tissue is dense as shown above in mammogram D.