

Breast Density and Your Mammogram Report

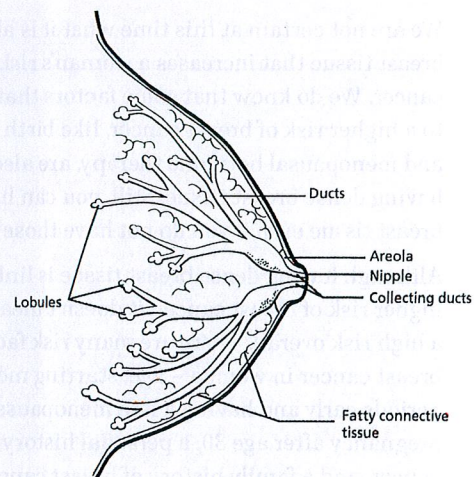


When you had your last mammogram, your report may have said that you have dense breast tissue. If so, you're probably wondering what this means.

What is dense breast tissue?

Breasts are made up of a mixture of lobules, ducts, and fatty and fibrous connective tissue. Lobules produce milk, and ducts are the tiny tubes that carry milk from the lobules to the nipple. The breast lobules are sometimes called glandular tissue because they produce milk. The fibrous connective tissue and the fatty tissue give breasts their size and shape and hold the glandular tissue in place.

Your breasts are considered dense if you have a lot of fibrous or glandular tissue but not much fatty tissue. Some women have more dense breast tissue than others for reasons we do not clearly understand. For most women, breast density decreases with age. But in some women, there is little change. Many women have dense breasts, and it's not abnormal.



How do I know if I have dense breasts?

Breast density can be determined only by mammograms. It is not related to breast size or firmness. You may think that because your breasts are firm, they are dense; but breast density is not determined by how your breasts feel.

When the radiologist looks at your mammogram, they determine your breast density. There are four categories of breast density. They go from almost all fatty tissue (which is the least dense) to almost all glandular and fibrous with very little fatty tissue (the most dense). The radiologist decides which of the four categories (below) best describes your level of breast density.



The breasts are almost entirely fatty.



There are scattered areas of fibroglandular density.



The breasts are heterogeneously dense, which may obscure small masses.



The breasts are extremely dense, which lowers the sensitivity of mammography.

You will get a letter summarizing your mammogram results. If your breast density by mammogram is heterogeneously or extremely dense, this letter may say that you have "dense breasts." Your doctor will also receive a report of your mammogram results with information about your breast density using the categories above.