What is breast density?
Breast density describes how the breasts look on a mammogram. It’s not a measure of how the breasts feel. Your radiologist may note breast density on your mammography report.

Breasts are made up of breast tissue (milk ducts and lobules) and fat. Connective tissue helps hold everything in place. Breast density compares the area of breast and connective tissue to the area of fat. Breast and connective tissue are denser than fat and this difference shows up on a mammogram.

- High breast density means there’s a greater amount of breast and connective tissue compared to fat.
- Low breast density means there’s a greater amount of fat compared to breast and connective tissue.

Young women often have dense breasts. As they get older, their breasts become less dense. After menopause, women’s breasts become less dense and more fatty. Women who use menopausal hormones tend to have denser breasts until they stop using hormones.

These mammogram images show a range of breast density. Some breasts are mostly fat (fatty breast) and some breasts are mostly breast and connective tissue (dense breast).

Screening in women with dense breasts
Dense breasts can make it hard to find breast cancer on a mammogram. This is because dense breast tissue can look white or light gray on a mammogram. Cancer also looks white or light gray so it can be hard to tell the difference.

Breast ultrasound, breast MRI and 3D mammography (each in combination with 2D digital mammography) are being studied to learn whether they improve detection in women with dense breasts compared to 2D digital mammography alone.

At this time, there are no special screening recommendations for women with dense breasts. Women with dense breasts are encouraged to follow the same breast cancer screening recommendations as women at average risk.

For more information, visit komen.org or call Susan G. Komen’s breast care helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 10 PM ET.
BREAST DENSITY

Breast density and breast cancer risk
Women with high breast density have an increased risk of breast cancer. However, we don’t know why breast density increases risk. It’s not clear if lowering breast density would decrease risk. For example, getting older and gaining weight after menopause are both related to a decrease in breast density. However, both are also related to an increase in breast cancer risk. More study is needed in this area.

Talking with a doctor
Ask your doctor if your mammogram shows you have dense breasts. If so, talk about whether other screening tests might be right for you.

Breast density legislation
Many states in the U.S. require health care providers to notify women if they have dense breasts found on a mammogram. Although it seems like this information would be helpful, breast density is not used by doctors to assess breast cancer risk. Again there are no special screening recommendations or guidelines for women with dense breasts at this time.

If you have concerns about your breast density, talk with your doctor.
For more information go to www.komen.org/breastdensity.

Komen’s statement on breast density legislation
Susan G. Komen® endorses federal legislation requiring mammography centers to report breast density information to health care providers and patients. Komen believes this legislation will improve the written mammography results providers send to patients. It requires the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to consult with leading cancer organizations (including Komen) in the development of standard wording for these patient reports. The legislation also directs the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to focus research on improving breast cancer screening methods.

The list of resources is only a suggested resource and is not a complete listing of breast health and breast cancer materials or information. The information contained herein is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or to replace the services of a medical professional. Komen does not endorse, recommend or make any warranties or representations regarding the accuracy, completeness, timeliness, quality or non-infringement of any of the materials, products or information provided by the organizations referenced herein.