

Are you calling me dense?

Maybe, but don't worry, dense breast tissue is normal, it is not an illness or a disease.

The human breast is made of lobules and ducts, which are the parts that make and carry milk. These are all surrounded by fibrous (dense) tissue and fatty tissue that give the breast their size and shape.

Each woman's breasts are different. The amount of fibrous tissue compared to the amount of fatty tissue defines how dense your breasts appear on a mammogram. About 40% of women over the age of 40 have dense breasts. Dense breasts often decrease as you get older, but not for everyone, for example:

- More than 50% of women in their 40s have dense breasts.
- 40% of women in their 50s have dense breasts.
- Less than 30% of women in their 60s have dense breasts.
- Only 25% of women in their 70s have dense breasts.

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Breast Density

Screening Program



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Breast Density Categories

The assessment of dense breasts is subjective, meaning there is not a true measurement. This means that the same mammogram read by a different radiologist or by the same radiologist at different time can vary. This does not mean that there is a problem with the mammogram or the radiologist reading the mammogram.

Below are different categories that your radiologist can use to report how dense your breasts are:

Class A (or 1): Fatty.

Class B (or 2): Scattered fibroglandular density.

Class C* (or 3): Heterogeneously dense.

Class D* (or 4): Extremely dense.

* Classes C and D fall under the 'dense' category. However, only about 10% of women fall into the Class D (or 4) 'extremely dense' category.

Why is breast density important?

Women who have dense breast tissue have a higher risk of breast cancer compared to women with less dense breast tissue. It's unclear at this

time why dense breast tissue is linked to breast cancer risk.

Dense breast tissue also makes it harder for radiologists to see cancer. On mammograms, both dense breast tissue and tumors look white. So, mammograms can be less precise in women with dense breasts.

What screening tests do I need if I have dense breast tissue?

Digital Breast Tomosynthesis

Most breast cancers can be seen on a mammogram. Digital Tomosynthesis (also known as 3D mammography) can find some cancers not seen on a standard mammogram. This is very important for women at higher than average risk. All screening mammograms done at Logan Health Medical Center, Logan Health – Whitefish and on the Winkley Imaging Center are 3D mammograms.

Abbreviated Breast Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)

Women who are higher than average risk may qualify for more tests your doctor might order (called supplemental screenings). Our best supplemental screening is called an Abbreviated Breast Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). This is a very fast exam and takes about 10 minutes. Research has shown that breast MRIs can help find some breast cancers that cannot be seen on mammograms. MRIs can often show non-cancer findings. This can then lead to more tests or even a biopsy to prove that it is not cancer. Based on your insurance, the Abbreviated Breast MRI may or may not have an extra cost to you. If for some reason you cannot have a breast MRI, Contrast Enhanced Mammography (CEM) is another supplemental screening we can offer you. Logan Health offers both Abbreviated Breast MRI and CEM.

So what should I do?

If you were told you have dense breasts, it is important to keep up on your yearly screening mammogram. And it is preferred you get a 3D mammogram. It is also important to be aware of any changes in your breasts and report them to your healthcare provider right away. Make sure you call your healthcare provider if you have any lumps, bumps, changes in the skin, pulling in of the nipple or fluid that suddenly drains from only one nipple. Breast pain or soreness that comes and goes is not a usual sign of cancer.

You may also think about supplemental screening. Supplemental screening should be a thoughtful choice after talking with your healthcare provider. This should not be a first reaction to breast density itself.

More questions? Ask your healthcare provider to refer you, or **call Logan Health Breast Center at (406) 751-6488** to learn more about our High Risk Clinic.

Want to learn more?

DenseBreast-info.org – an education resource developed to provide breast density information to both patients and healthcare professionals.

Breast360.org – a program of the American Society of Breast Surgeons Foundation where breast care experts share their knowledge and helpful information for patients.

Cancer.org – American Cancer Society, a nationwide community-based voluntary health organization dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem.

RadiologyInfo.org – a resource for patients from the American College of Radiology and the Radiological Society of North America that tells you how x-ray, CT, MRI, ultrasound, radiation therapy and other procedures are performed.

