

## What should I do if I have dense breasts?

Talk to your healthcare provider about what breast density means for you and your risk level. Regardless of your breast density, mammograms are recommended for women who are 45 to 74 years old.

You may be offered a change to your breast health screening routine. This could include more frequent screening or an additional test to mammography, such as an ultrasound (test using high frequency sound waves).

There are benefits and risks to each of these options. For example, an ultrasound may have a higher chance of finding a cancer if you have dense breasts but may also have a false positive (finding that is not actually cancer) more often. This could increase the chances of having unnecessary follow up tests or even unnecessary treatment for something that never would have been a problem if not found. It is therefore important to talk with your healthcare provider about the benefits and risks as they apply to you.

## If I don't have dense breasts, should I still screen?

Yes. You'll get the most benefit from regular screening with a mammogram.

### Remember

Dense breasts are only one of many risk factors for breast cancer. Talk with your healthcare provider for more information or check out the breast density info on [screeningforlife.ca](http://screeningforlife.ca)

## About the Alberta Breast Cancer Screening Program

The Alberta Breast Cancer Screening Program (ABCSP) is part of Alberta Health Services (AHS) and works together with the Alberta Society of Radiologists. The ABCSP mails your screening mammogram results to you via the radiology clinic.

To get letters from the ABCSP, your name and address must be up to date with Alberta Health. If you need to update your information, call 310-0000 (toll free) then dial 780-427-1432.

### Cancer Screening

Screening is one of the best things you can do for yourself to find breast cancer early. Breast, cervical, and colorectal cancer screening saves lives.

For more information, please contact AHS Cancer Screening Programs.

- Call 1-866-727-3926
- Fax 1-888-944-3388
- Visit [www.screeningforlife.ca](http://www.screeningforlife.ca)

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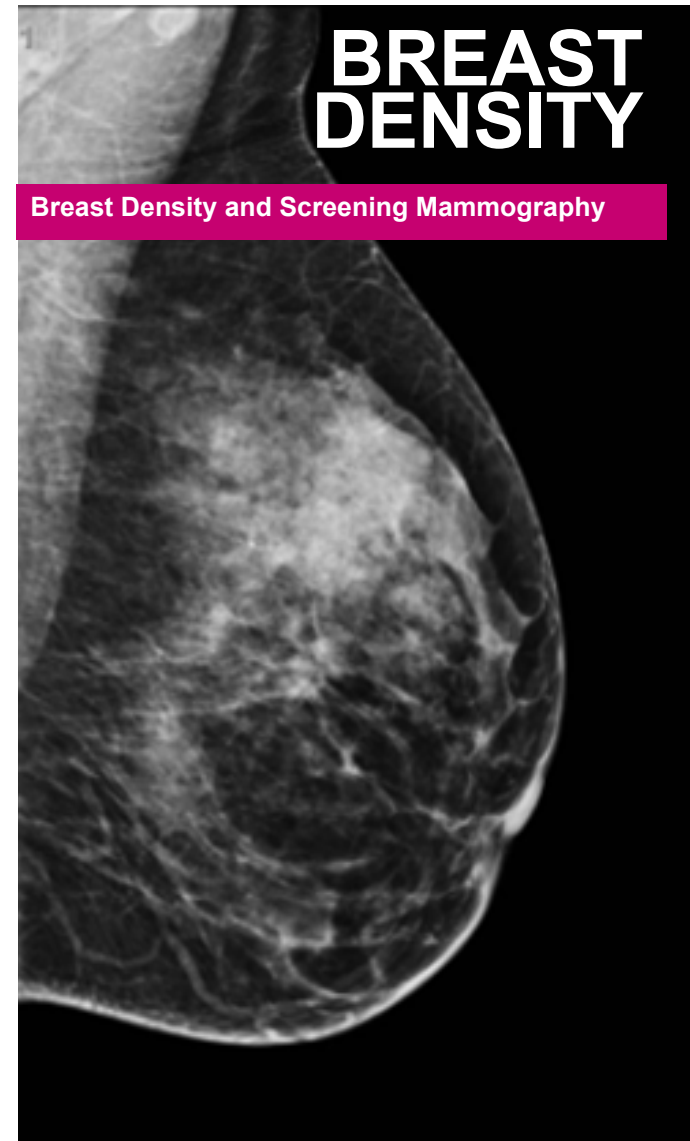


Alberta Breast Cancer  
Screening Program



# BREAST DENSITY

## Breast Density and Screening Mammography

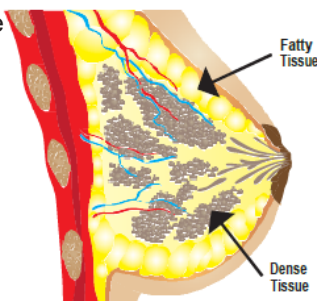


# SCREENING FOR LIFE.CA

# Dense breasts are very common and one of many risk factors for breast cancer.

## What is breast density?

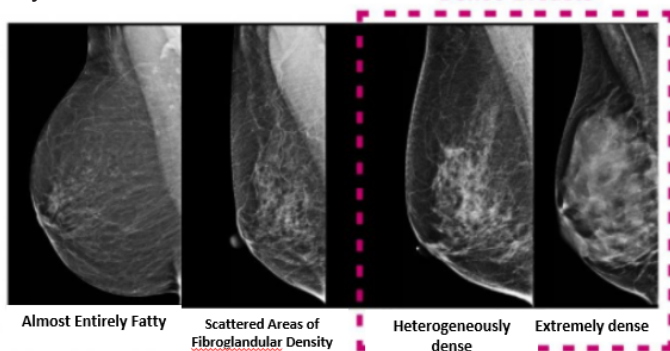
The breast is made up of dense fibroglandular tissue (normal parts of the breast other than fat) and non-dense tissue (fat). Breast density is the amount of dense tissue compared to the amount of fat in the breast. In other words, the more dense tissue you have, the higher your breast density will be.



## What are the breast density categories?

There are 4 categories of breast density:

- A) Almost Entirely Fatty: The breasts are almost entirely fat.
- B) Scattered Areas of Fibroglandular Density: The breasts have scattered areas of density.
- C) Heterogeneously Dense: The breasts have more dense tissue.
- D) Extremely Dense: The breasts are made up of very dense tissue.



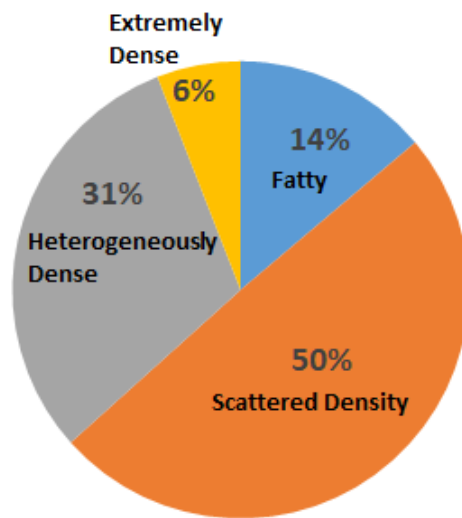
*Note:* In order to find out your breast density you first need to have a mammogram.

## How common are dense breasts?

The term "dense breasts" usually refers to breasts that are either heterogeneously dense or extremely dense. Dense breasts are very common. About half of all women have dense breasts. There are many things that may affect your breast density like genetics, hormone levels, and overall body fat.

The pie chart below shows how many women, who are 50 or older, were in each breast density category in Alberta.

- A) Fatty: 14% (or just over 1 in 10)
- B) Scattered: 50% (or 5 in 10)
- C) Heterogeneously Dense: 31% (or just over 3 in 10)
- D) Extremely Dense: 6% (or just under 1 in 10)



Breast density can be determined by the radiologist or by a computer program. As a result, the score may be a little different from one exam to the next. Breast density can also change as you get older, typically going down.

**Remember:** Breast density can change. Density tends to go down as you age.

## Why are dense breasts a concern?

### Breast cancer risk

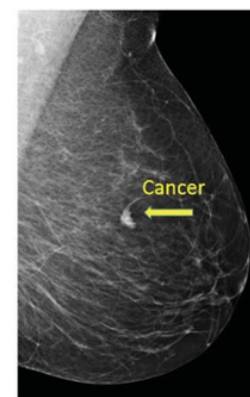
Women in Alberta have a 1 in 7 chance of developing breast cancer in their lifetime. Research to date shows that women with dense breasts are diagnosed with breast cancer about 1-2 times more often than average. However, keep in mind that other factors, such as age and genetics, have a larger impact on your overall risk of breast cancer.

**Remember:** Having dense breasts does not mean that you will get breast cancer. It's only one of many risk factors you should be aware of.

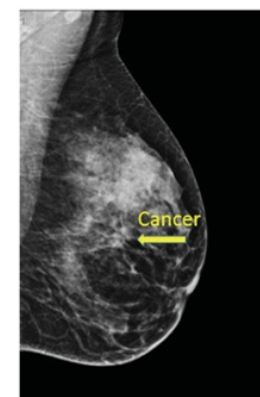
To find out more about other risk factors, visit [screeningforlife.ca](http://screeningforlife.ca).

### Breast cancer detection

Dense breasts can also make it more difficult to spot cancer on a mammogram. Dense tissue shows up as white on a mammogram, the same colour as many kinds of breast cancer. This is shown in the images below.



Fatty



Dense

However, keep in mind that radiologists are trained to spot cancers. Having had a previous mammogram helps radiologists to find changes in your breasts.