**What is breast density?**

Breast density compares the amount of fat to the amount of tissue on a mammogram. A dense breast has more tissue than fat. Younger women often have dense breasts. As women get older, their breasts become less dense. After menopause, the breast tissue of most women is replaced by fat. Older women who use menopausal hormones may have higher breast density until they stop using hormones.

**Why is breast density important?**

Women with dense breasts have an increased risk of breast cancer. We don’t know why breast density is linked to breast cancer. More research is needed in this area.

**Screening in women with dense breasts**

Dense breasts can make it hard to find breast cancer on a mammogram. Dense breast tissue can look white or light gray on a mammogram. Cancer can also look white or light gray.

Mammogram images can be stored on film (standard mammogram) or on a computer (digital mammogram). Digital images can be lightened, darkened or enlarged. Tumors in women with dense breasts may be easier to see in digital images than on film. Also, since digital images are stored on a computer, they can be shared with other radiologists more easily than standard films.

Ultrasound and breast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) with mammography is being studied as a screening tool for women with dense breasts. Studies are looking to see if these tests can find tumors easier than film mammography. Results should tell us whether these tests will be good screening tools for these women.

For more information, visit www.komentoolkits.org.
What can I do?
Ask your doctor if your mammogram shows you have dense breasts. If so, talk about what screening tests may be right for you.

Breast self-awareness messages:
1. Know your risk
   • Talk to both sides of your family to learn about your family health history
   • Talk to a doctor about your risk of breast cancer

2. Know what is normal for you
See a health care provider if you notice any of these breast changes:
   • Lump, hard knot or thickening inside the breast or underarm area
   • Swelling, warmth, redness or darkening of the breast
   • Change in the size or shape of the breast
   • Dimpling or puckering of the skin
   • Itchy, scaly sore or rash on the nipple
   • Pulling in of your nipple or other parts of the breast
   • Nipple discharge that starts suddenly
   • New pain in one spot that does not go away

3. Get screened
Talk with a doctor about which screening tests are right for you if you are at a higher risk
   • Have a clinical breast exam

4. Make healthy lifestyle choices
   • Maintain a healthy weight
   • Add exercise into your routine
   • Limit alcohol intake
   • Limit menopausal hormone use
   • Breastfeed, if you can

How do doctors use breast density?
Today, doctors do not routinely use breast density to measure breast cancer risk. However, if your doctor concludes that you have dense breasts, he/she may suggest other breast screening tests. Some breast cancer screening reports contain language about breast density in mammogram reports. Although it seems like this information should be helpful, there are no evidenced-based guidelines. While women with dense breasts appear to be at higher risk of breast cancer, it is not clear that lower breast density will decrease risk. For example, getting older and gaining weight after menopause are both related to a decrease in breast density. However, they are also related to an increase in breast cancer risk. More study is needed in this area.

If you have concerns about your breast density, please consult a doctor.