

DENSE BREASTS

AFTER HAVING A MAMMOGRAM, I WAS TOLD THAT I HAVE DENSE BREASTS. IS DENSE BREAST TISSUE ABNORMAL?

No, dense breast tissue is common and normal. Having dense breasts does not mean that you have cancer, but it may make cancer harder to find on a mammogram. Dense breast tissue may be one of the many factors associated with an increased risk of developing breast cancer. The most important risk factors for developing breast cancer are being a woman and growing older.

WHAT IS BREAST DENSITY?

Breast density refers to how much breast tissue a woman has. Density cannot be determined by the size of the breast, by touch during a health care provider's examination, or by your self-exam. Most women have both fat and fibroglandular (working part of the breast) tissue in varying proportions. Mammography, an X-ray exam of the breasts, can provide information about the types of tissues that breasts contain.

WHAT DOES BREAST CANCER SCREENING REFER TO?

Breast cancer is one of most common cancers diagnosed in women in the United States. Screening for breast cancer refers to detecting an abnormality when it is unsuspected.

HOW IS SCREENING FOR BREAST CANCER DONE?

Physical examination by your doctor or other health care provider and a mammography are among the most common methods to screen for breast cancer. Additional ways to "see through" dense breast tissue differently also can have value. These ways include ultrasound and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), to supplement but not substitute for mammography. Research also is being done on Tomosynthesis, a new 3D form of X-ray mammography that allows breast tissue to be examined one layer at a time. Though it is not yet widely available, its use is expected to increase in the years ahead.

WHERE CAN I FIND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION?

Illinois Department of Public Health
Office of Women's Health and Family Services
Women's Health-Line 888-522-1282
www.idph.state.il.us/about/womenshealth/owh.htm

American Cancer Society
800-227-2345
www.cancer.org

American College of Radiology
800-227-5463
www.acr.org

Illinois Emergency Management Agency
www.state.il.us/iem

This information is being provided to you to increase your awareness so that you can talk to your health care provider about your risk of breast cancer and decide which, if any, of the additional options may benefit you.

