

Dense Breasts: What to Ask

What your mammogram letter means, and the questions that earn their minute at your next visit.

✓ **Verified against published guidance** from the National Cancer Institute, FDA & Mayo Clinic · sources below

This sheet is for planning your screening conversation. A new lump or breast change needs a doctor now, whatever your density.

✓ Know and Ask

Find the Density Line

- In every US mammogram letter
- Says dense or not dense
- Required since September 2024

COACH'S TIP Cannot find the letter? Call the imaging center.

Know What Dense Means

- More fibrous and glandular tissue
- Seen only on a mammogram
- Less fatty tissue

COACH'S TIP About half of women over 40 have it.

Know the Four Categories

- Almost entirely fatty
- Heterogeneously or extremely dense
- Scattered fibroglandular density

COACH'S TIP The last two categories get the dense letter.

Ask About Your Overall Risk

- Density is one factor
- Ask where you land overall
- Family history and age count too

COACH'S TIP The letter is a conversation starter, not a verdict.

Ask About Extra Imaging

- Ultrasound or MRI
- For some people with dense tissue
- Added to your mammogram

COACH'S TIP FDA wording: other imaging tests may help find cancers.

Keep the Regular Mammogram

- Still the foundation
- Screening lowers breast cancer deaths
- Early detection improves survival

COACH'S TIP Book the next one before you leave.

✗ Do Not Assume

That Normal Saw Everything

- Dense tissue looks white
- Small tumors can hide
- Cancer looks white too

COACH'S TIP Detection falls from about 80% to under 60% in dense breasts.

That You Could Feel It

- Not in a self-exam
- Only the mammogram shows it
- Not in a clinical exam

COACH'S TIP Firmness is not density.

That Dense Means Disease

- Common and normal
- About half of women over 40
- A risk factor, not a diagnosis

COACH'S TIP Dense-breast patients are no more likely to die of breast cancer.

That It Stays Fixed

- Tends to fall with age
- Hormone therapy can raise it
- Falls after having children

COACH'S TIP Your category can change from year to year.

That Extra Tests Replace It

- Supplemental means added
- Regular screening saves lives
- The mammogram stays

COACH'S TIP Ultrasound or MRI ride alongside, not instead.

That a Change Can Wait

- A new lump
- New persistent pain
- Skin or nipple changes

COACH'S TIP See a doctor now, whatever your last letter said.

THE NUMBERS BEHIND THIS SHEET

Three figures worth bringing to the conversation

About half Of US women over 40 have dense breast tissue on a mammogram

80% to under 60%

Mammogram detection without dense tissue vs with it

Sept 2024 When density notification became required on every US mammogram report