

Why All the Fuss About Breast Density? *By Dr. Lisa Sheppard*

The answer is rather simple and yet complex. The simple first - the "denser" your breasts the harder it is for a Radiologist to "see" a cancer on your mammogram. Density is determined by your mammogram. It cannot be determined by physical exam or any other test.

When you have a mammogram, one of the first observations your Radiologist makes is whether the breast tissue is dense. The doctor will classify the overall pattern as one of

four classifications: fatty, scattered fibroglandular tissue, heterogeneously dense, or very dense. This is noted in your mammogram report. The heterogeneously dense and dense pattern classifications make up about half of all women younger than 50 and a third of women over 50. The density of the breast is one of the strongest predictors of the difficulty of mammography to detect cancer. This is because cancers typically appear as small white spots on the mammogram. The mam-

mograms in women with fatty breasts show mostly a black background, and white spots associated with small breast cancers can be apparent. In dense breasts, the background is mostly white, which makes it more difficult to detect the small breast cancer, which is mostly white. The challenge of detecting a small cancer in a dense breast has been compared to the difficulty of finding a snowman in a snowstorm.

With that said, to find cancers early,

women with dense breasts need an additional annual screening evaluation, such as a breast ultrasound or MRI. Research has found women with very dense breasts also have a 4 to 5 times greater risk of developing breast cancer compared to women with fatty, non-dense breasts. Unfortunately, there is nothing you can do to lower the density of your breasts. All women should ask their Radiologist or Family Doctor for their breast density. It is smart to know your density so you can protect yourself from advanced cancer by requesting a screening Ultrasound or, in some cases, MRI. Your density information will be in your official mammography report sent to your Doctor or in the letter you receive from the PINK Breast Center.

In addition, now in the state of New Jersey, a new paragraph has appeared in the letters the patients receive talking about breast density and your right to have the additional exam. If you have heterogeneously dense or extremely dense breasts, your doctor should send you or you should ask for an additional screening ultrasound test each year in addition to your mammogram. If your risk is average, you should



have a screening Ultrasound and a mammogram every year. Your life is too important. If you are taking the time to be screened for breast cancer make sure you are getting a complete and effective screening. Know your density. Ask your radiologist for that vital information. to learn more, call PINK Breast Center at 908-284-2300, or visit www.AreYouDense.org and our own www.StaceyVitielloMD.com.

Fact: Mammogram saves lives...So why do we keep hearing you shouldn't have one? *By Lisa Sheppard MD*

As federal guidelines are updated under ObamaCare, and are on track to go into effect January 1, 2016, private insurance and Medicare coverage for a procedure that millions of women currently get at no cost will be affected.

In 2015, the American Cancer Society estimates 231, 840 women in the U.S. will be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer. 40,290 of them will die. Even more alarming is that number is expected to surge. The National Institutes of Health predicts the number of U.S. women diagnosed with breast cancer could increase by as much as 50 percent within the next 15 years. Many of these deaths can be prevented with regular mammograms and early detection. So why aren't they?

Ask the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF). The Task Force, a government appointed volunteer panel of doctors in Family Practice and internal medicine interested in preventive care and evidence-based medicine regularly review the "scientific data" about breast cancer screening. The group recently posted a draft recommendation that the benefit of mammography screening increases with age, with the 50 to 74 age group benefiting the most. Yet they recommend women over 50 only get a mammogram every other year till the age of 70.

The Task Force found that mammography screening may not be necessary at all for women in their 40s. This means ObamaCare and Medicare will no longer cover annual screenings beginning 2016.

Is the USPSTF looking to increase the breast cancer death rate? What is their reasoning behind the recommendation. Well, the experts on the USPSTF say annual mammograms put women at higher risk for false positive findings. That is, a radiologist sees something on the screening mammogram exam that may be suspicious and calls the woman back for additional imaging only to find there is no cancer. The USPSTF states that screening that results in a false posi-

tive causes stress and potentially puts a woman's life at risk due to unnecessary tests. What tests are so horrific to allow so many cancers to go undiagnosed? Additional mammogram images? A breast Ultrasound? In rare cases a Biopsy or an MRI? A study reported in 2014 by the Journal of the American Medical Association, however, disagrees with the USPSTF's conclusion about the magnitude of the issue. It found that while false positive results do cause anxiety and stress, the anxiety is short term and doesn't affect the woman's overall health and wellbeing. And, women who received false positive results said they would continue to have mammograms in the future. The USPSTF itself notes in its statement that the risk to a woman's life due to diagnostic followup is very small.

When the Task Force issued similar guidelines back in 2009, it took an act of Congress to ensure mammography coverage for women younger than 50. This new legislation eliminates private insurance coverage and Medicare coverage of annual mammograms for women over 40. Is an act of Congress again necessary to preserve these lifesaving procedures? Unfortunately unlike last time there has been very little information in the media about this.

I am very concern about the future of women's breast health and have started a petition on Move on to raise awareness. What can you do? Sign the petition and forward to your frienda and family. Be heard.

- Call or email your Congressman. [Contact info: <http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/>]
- Call your insurance provider.
- Push for annual mammography coverage for women in their 40s under the Affordable Care Act.
- Save your own life and those you love.

In the meantime, I encourage every woman to learn about your risk for breast cancer. Ask relatives if they know of anyone, male or female, in the family who has had breast cancer. Ask your physician if you have any other risk factors, and, if you're under 40, whether you should get a base line mammogram. If you're over 40, get to know your body and get a screening mammogram this year. It is a covered benefit under the Affordable Care Act and will not cost you anything. All insurance plans pay for screening mammography without a co-pay or deductible.

For further information, call the PINK Breast Center at 908 284-2300.

PINK Breast Center Introduces State of the Art 3-D Ultrasound

PINK Breast Center now has the Siemens Acuson S2000 ABVS, the world's first multifunctional ultrasound breast scanner. This technology creates accurate, three-dimensional images and helps detect breast cancer early, especially among women who have dense breast tissue without radiation. The test is quick and painless. Typically three scans are taken, and the entire exam is usually completed within 15 minutes. The best part is, it's a service covered by your insurance in the state of New Jersey.

If you have dense breast tissue

or a history of breast disease, you may benefit from screening with 3-D breast ultrasound. Having dense breast tissue increases a woman's risk for breast cancer up to five times. Ultrasound is helpful because it has the unique ability to distinguish between dense and fatty tissue. It's also non-ionizing, which means it doesn't expose you to radiation.

PINK Breast Center has been designated a Center of Excellence for Breast Imaging by the American College of Radiology.

For more information, call PINK Breast Center at 908-284-2300.



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