Effective June 2019, BreastCheck will report breast density to screening mammogram participants and their primary care providers. Mammographic density will be assessed and reported as either more than 75% or less than 75% dense breast tissue. Additional testing is not recommended for women with dense breasts who are otherwise at average risk.

**Breast Density**

- **Breast density is used by radiologists to describe the appearance of breast tissue.** Breast density can only be assessed on a mammogram; it is not related to the way breasts look or feel, and cannot be measured with a clinical exam.

- **Breast density is not an abnormal finding.** It is a measure of the distribution of glandular and fibrous connective tissue to fatty tissue in the breast. Women with more than 75% dense breast tissue are considered to have extremely dense breasts. Dense breasts are more likely to be found in younger women and density typically decreases with age.

- **Breast density can affect breast cancer risk in two ways:**
  1. Dense breast tissue decreases the sensitivity of mammograms by masking cancerous tissue.
  2. Women with dense breasts have a higher risk of breast cancer. The relative risk of breast cancer for women with extremely dense breasts is at least 2 times greater than for women at average risk.

Despite this increased risk, there is no known association between dense breasts and increased breast cancer mortality.

Cancerous tissue can look like dense breast tissue on a mammogram:

![Almost entirely fatty](image)

![Scattered areas of fibroglandular density](image)

![Heterogeneously dense](image)

![Extremely dense](image)

**Used with permission of BC Cancer, 2018.**

- **Breast density is one of several risk factors for breast cancer.** Other risk factors may increase a woman’s risk of breast cancer more than breast density including: increasing age, personal and family history of breast abnormalities or related cancers, obesity, genetic factors (BRCA1, BRCA2, etc.). Talk to your patients about their personal risk for breast cancer and how to reduce modifiable risk factors.
**Other Testing**

- **There is insufficient evidence to show that women with dense breasts (at otherwise average risk) should have more frequent mammograms or different screening tests** (e.g. MRI, ultrasound). Mammography is the most effective screening test for women aged 50-74 to reduce breast cancer mortality. We do **not** recommend referring women for additional testing based only on their density.

**Know What is Normal**

- **No screening test is perfect.** Encourage your patients to know what looks and feels normal for their breasts and to see their primary care provider if they notice any changes in their breasts, even if their screening mammograms were normal.

- **Changes to pay attention to**

  - Puckering of the skin.
  - Change in the nipple.
  - New or bloody discharge.
  - Change in the size, shape or colour.
  - Thickened hard skin that feels different than the rest of the breast tissue.
  - A new lump.

Visit cancercare.mb.ca/screening for more information or to order patient resources.