

Roadblock Responses



It's not considered standard of care for women with dense breasts to automatically get additional screening.

Multiple studies show that adding supplemental screening to mammography can find many more cancers in women with dense breasts. I would like to go above and beyond the standard of care to make sure any cancer is found early. Ultrasound finds 2-3 more cancers per thousand women with dense breasts, and Molecular Breast Imaging (MBI), Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), or Contrast Enhanced Spectral Mammography (CESM) find more than that. (1)



You don't have major breast cancer risk factors.

Simply having breast density is a significant risk factor for breast cancer. A woman with extremely dense breasts is 4-6 more times likely to develop breast cancer than a woman with little to no breast density. (2)



You don't have a family history of breast cancer.

Most women diagnosed with breast cancer don't have a family history of the disease. About 15 percent of women diagnosed with breast cancer have a first-degree female relative (mother, sister or daughter) who's also had it. (3)



There are many unnecessary biopsies as a result of additional imaging.

This can be true. However, women do not die of false positives, but a false negative (not finding the cancer until it is too late) can be deadly. I want to know my options. The earlier breast cancer is found, the higher the chance of survival. (4)



You aren't at a 20% or higher lifetime risk, so you don't qualify.

Does your risk model include density? If not, it should. What do you recommend beyond mammograms for those of us with dense breasts? Additionally, many women who develop breast cancer are not particularly at higher risk.

References:

1. Wendie A. Berg, MD, PhD, Elizabeth A. Rafferty, MD, Sarah M. Friedewald, MD, Carrie B. Hruska, PhD, Habib Rahbar, MD. Screening Algorithms in Dense Breasts: AJR Expert Panel Narrative Review. American Journal of Roentgenology. 2021;216: 275-294. 10.2214/AJR.20.24436
2. Boyd NF, Guo H, Martin LJ, et al. Mammographic density and the risk and detection of breast cancer. N Engl J Med. 356(3):227-36, 2007
3. <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/breast-cancer/understanding-a-breast-cancer-diagnosis/breast-cancer-survival-rates.html>
4. Sprague BL, Gangnon RE, Burt V, et al. Prevalence of mammographically dense breasts in the United States. J Natl Cancer Inst 2014; 106:dju255 [PubMed: 25217577]