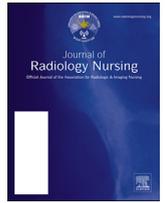


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Letter to the Editor

## Dense Breasts: An Education Resource



Until recently, breast density information had not been routinely provided to the person most affected by it—the patient herself. Thanks in large part to grassroots advocacy efforts, women in over half of the US states now receive some level of notification about breast density after their mammogram. This rising awareness about the implications of dense tissue has led to new patient/health care provider discussions about the masking and risk implications of dense tissue, and a medically-sourced resource was needed. [DenseBreast-info.org](http://DenseBreast-info.org), the collaborative effort of experts in breast imaging and medical reviewers, was launched in 2015 and has been cited as the most comprehensive resource on the topic. This educational tool, developed for both patients and health providers, has just expanded internationally and now includes European-specific content for European health providers, and patient educational tools in Spanish.

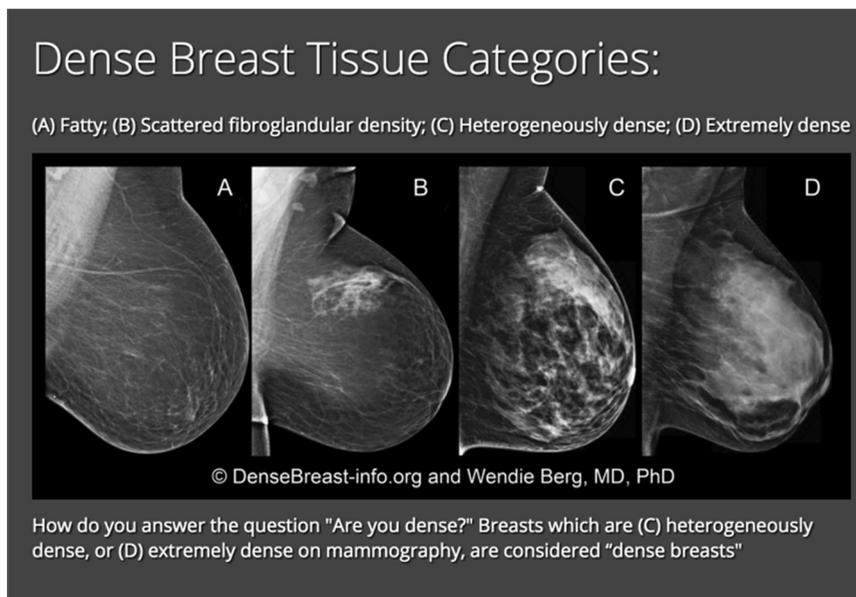
### What is breast density?

All breasts are composed of milk-producing glands, fibrous tissue and fat. Glands and fibrous tissue are considered dense tissue

and the more glandular tissue present, the denser the breast. Breast density is assessed on a mammogram by the amount of fatty tissue compared to dense tissue and is classified into one of four categories (See [Figure 1](#)). Breasts that are assessed as “heterogeneously dense” or “extremely dense” on the mammogram are considered “dense”. As the images show, as the relative amount of dense breast tissue increases, breast tissue appears increasingly white or light gray on a mammogram.

### Why does density matter?

Both dense tissue and cancerous tumors display as white or light gray on a mammogram and this can result in cancers being “masked” by or mistaken for normal dense tissue. Trying to find a cancer in a dense breast has been compared to trying to find a snowball in a snowstorm ([Figure 2](#)). A fatty breast, which displays darker on a mammogram, provides better contrast to detect the whiter tumor. In a dense breast, there may be little or no contrast between tissue and tumor, and this issue is still a problem on tomosynthesis or “3D”-mammography.



**Figure 1.** BI-RADS® density categories.  
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**Suggested Reading**

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JoAnn Pushkin

Executive Director

DenseBreast-info.org, NY

E-mail address: [jpushkin@dense-info.org](mailto:jpushkin@dense-info.org).

Wendie A. Berg, MD, PhD

Professor of Radiology

Magee-Womens Hospital of UPMC

University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine