

Guide for Clinicians with Patients Who Have Dense Breasts

If your patient has mammographically dense breasts (heterogeneously dense or extremely dense, per radiologist qualitative assessment), she will be notified of her breast density per California State Law requirement ([SB 1538](#)). This notification may prompt questions regarding the need for supplemental breast cancer screening due to the decreased sensitivity of mammography and the increased risk of breast cancer associated with increased mammographic density.

If your patient has a breast symptom or abnormal physical exam, this should be evaluated based on [established algorithms](#) for symptomatic breast care.

Assuming your patient does not have a breast symptom or abnormal physical exam, first screen your patients for any of the following red-flag risk factors.

| Red-Flag Risk Factors | Yes | No |
|---|------------|-----------|
| 1st degree relative (mother, sister, daughter) with a history of pre-menopausal breast cancer | | |
| Male relative with breast cancer | | |
| Personal or familial BRCA mutation | | |
| 1st or 2nd degree relative with ovarian cancer | | |
| History of mantle radiation | | |
| History of atypical hyperplasia (ADH or ALH) or LCIS on prior breast biopsy | | |

If your patient has a risk factor that may be due to a genetic mutation (personal or family cancer history), she may benefit from a formal breast cancer risk assessment by a cancer genetics clinic to determine if supplemental screening with MRI or ultrasound would be appropriate.

If your patient has a risk factor that may be due to a non-genetic cause (radiation exposure, atypical hyperplasia/LCIS), she may benefit from a referral to a breast oncologist for further guidance regarding supplemental screening options.

If your patient does NOT have any of these risk factors, you can reassure her regarding the minor incremental increase in risk associated with her breast density (RR=1.2 for women with heterogeneously dense breasts and RR=2 for women with extremely dense breasts, compared to women with average breast density), and encourage her to continue annual mammographic screening.

If you or your patient have additional questions regarding breast density, breast cancer risk, or the density notification law in California, please visit www.breastdensity.info for a summary of evidence-based recommendations from the California Breast Density Information Group (CBDIG), a working group of breast radiologists and breast cancer risk specialists, representing academic and community-based practices across California, formed to assist patients, referring doctors, and radiologists in responding to this newly legislated mandate for mammographic density notification.