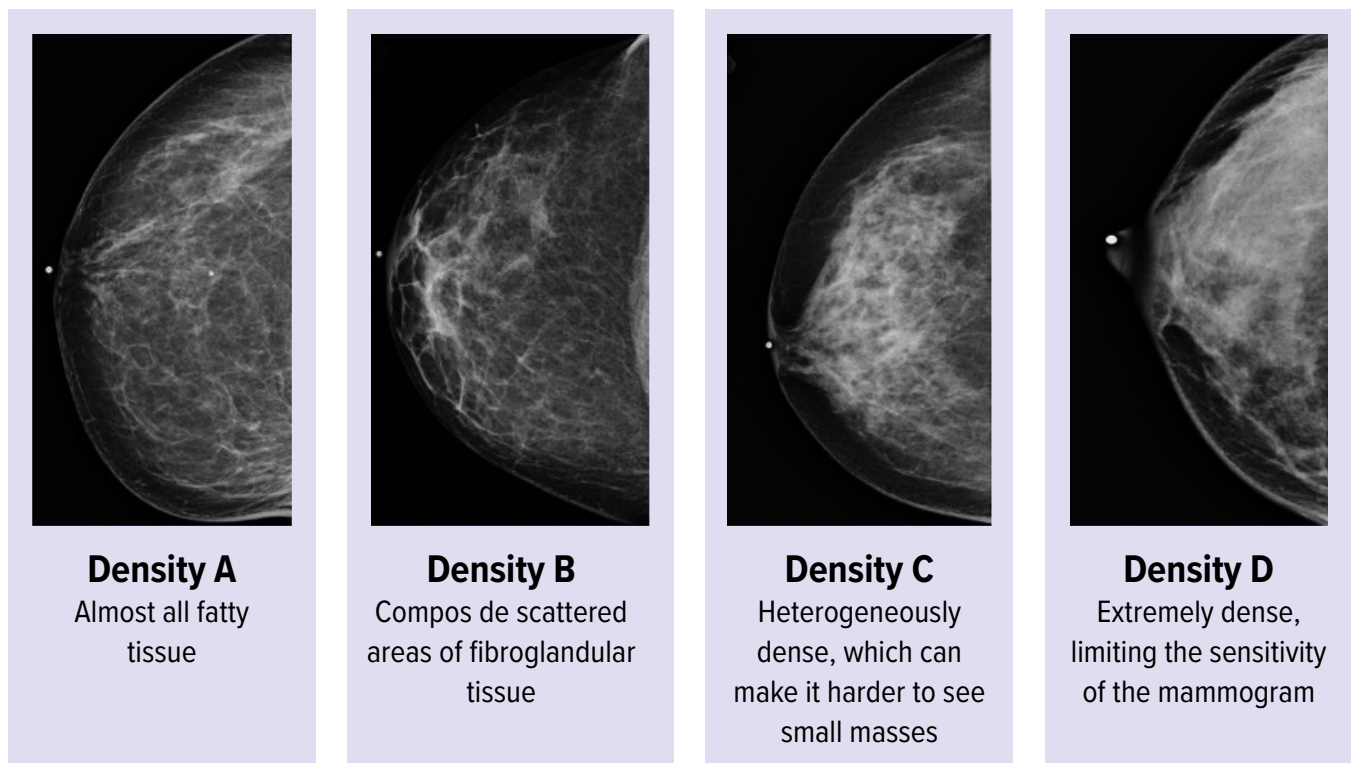


# What is breast density?

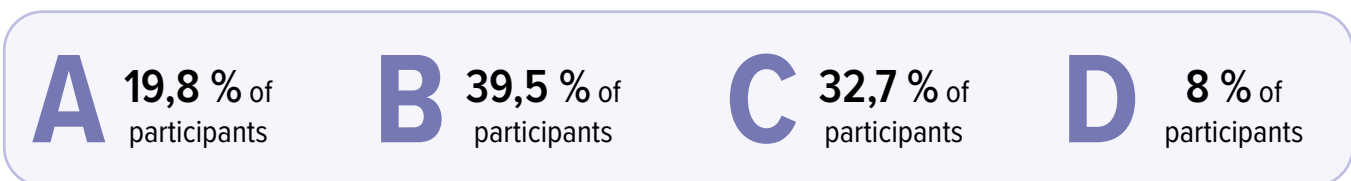
The breasts contain two types of tissue: glands and ducts surrounded by fibrous tissue and fat. Fibrous tissue appears denser (white) on a mammogram. Breast density is the amount of fibrous tissue relative to the amount of fat in the breast.

Breast density cannot be felt and it has nothing to do with breast size or firmness. It can only be assessed by mammography by a radiologist.

Radiologists use a system called BI RADS to classify density into four categories, from A to D:



Breast density varies from person to person. In 2020, most participants in the Québec Breast Cancer Screening Program (PQDCS) had a density B or C result:



Density can change over time. For example, it often decreases after menopause or with age.

## BREAST DENSITY AND SCREENING

All PQDCS mammogram reports mention breast density. It is important because:

- research shows that high breast density is considered a risk factor for breast cancer;
- mammography is less effective when breast density is very high. Among PQDCS participants, mammography detects 7.3 out of 10 breast cancers when breast density is very high (density D), compared with 9.3 out of 10 breast cancers when breast density is very low (density A). **Mammography is nonetheless the examination of choice for screening, even when breast density is very high. Mammography is the only recognized screening modality for breast cancer in the PQDCS.**

It is therefore important to consult your attending physician or attending specialized nurse practitioner (SNP) without delay if you notice changes in your breasts, even if the screening mammogram is normal. You can also consult them if you are concerned about your risk of breast cancer or if you want to discuss ways to reduce this risk.

### ADDITIONAL SCREENING TESTS FOR WOMEN WITH EXTREMELY DENSE BREASTS

Current scientific studies do not support the systematic use of other screening tests when high breast density is the only risk factor.

However, other tests may be recommended by the radiologist in this situation. It is important to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of having these tests with your attending physician or attending SNP.