

A new study is providing more proof that women with dense breasts have a higher risk for breast cancer.

The study, published in [Radiology](#), included more than 100,000 women and more than 300,000 screening exams.

“That actually is not really clearly understood. It’s just known that there must be some biological reason with that type of breast composition why those women tend to have a higher risk for breast cancer,” said Dr. Jessica Guingrich, a medical radiologist for OSF HealthCare and the Susan G. Komen Breast Center.

Breast density cannot be detected with a manual exam, and needs to be determined by a mammogram.

“It doesn’t have anything to do with how the breasts feel, like if it feels thick or heavy. It actually has to do with that mammographic appearance,” explained Dr. Guingrich.

She added that dense breast tissue can actually hide or mask cancers because it shows up white on a mammogram, which is also how breast tumors appear.

Dr. Guingrich suggests women ask for a 3D mammogram, which allows radiologists to get a more in-depth look.

“If you can imagine a normal 2D mammogram, which is the traditional mammogram, is like looking at a book closed,” she said. “A 3D mammogram actually opens up the book and lets us flip through page by page, layer by layer, millimeter by millimeter through the tissue.”

Dr. Guingrich says breast ultrasound or an MRI are other effective screening methods, although the expensive MRI option may not be covered by insurance in some cases.

While the correlation between dense breast tissue and cancer risk has been proven, there is still more research to be done. Dr. Guingrich says women need to be vigilant and recommends women get a mammogram every year starting at age 40.

Every mammogram report will have a tissue density listed. While some states require tissue density reports to be sent to patients, Illinois does not. Patients can speak with their doctors to learn their own status after a screening.

In addition to educating women about the need for screening mammograms, being able to get one easily and in a timely manner is just as important. The Center for Breast Health located at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center in downtown Peoria offers walk-in mammography appointments on Wednesdays from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. They are the only Peoria-area provider to offer walk-in appointments.

With the use of digital mammography, a typical screening mammogram takes 30 minutes or less. In Illinois, insurance companies are required to cover the cost of a screening mammogram if a woman meets screening guidelines. To schedule a mammogram call 309-683-5522.

