TuSalud

With New FDA Rule, American Cancer Society Shares What Women Should Know about Breast Density

The ACS highlights the importance of regular screening and informed decision-making, as dense breast tissue increases breast cancer risk and complicates mammogram detection.

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According to the American Cancer Society, roughly 310,720 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year, making it the most common cancer in women in the United States, aside from skin cancers. While the average risk of a woman in the U.S. developing breast cancer is about 13%, for women with dense breast tissue, the risk is even higher.

Breast density is a measure of how much fibrous and glandular tissue there is in a woman's breast compared to fat tissue. Having dense breasts is a common occurrence in the U.S., affecting about 40% of women nationwide. Women with dense breast tissue have a 15%-20% greater risk for developing breast cancer and having a false-negative mammogram since mammography does not as readily reveal breast cancers among women with dense breast tissue due to "masking" (i.e., when mammographic breast density obscures a breast cancer).

"While the link between dense breast tissue and breast cancer risk is unclear, it's critically important for women to be informed about their breast density" said Dr. Arif Kamal, chief patient officer for the American Cancer Society. "Dense breast tissue also appears white on a mammogram, the same color as masses and cancers, making them more difficult to spot.

In March 2023, the FDA approved a proposed rule that would amend the Mammography Quality Standards Act to require that women be notified of their breast density. The rule also called for health care providers to discuss breast density with patients and explore supplemental screening options. As part of this new rule, health facilities were required to institute the new FDA provisions by September 2024.

The American Cancer Society's advocacy affiliate, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), advocates for evidence-based public policies to reduce the cancer burden for everyone.

ACS CAN is working to ensure access to comprehensive insurance coverage without cost sharing

for recommended breast cancer screening and follow-up testing for asymptomatic individuals, regardless of risk," said Lisa Lacasse, president of the ACS CAN. "For breast cancer screening, this can include additional imaging after an initial abnormal mammogram or if dense breast tissue is present.

Women who have dense breasts should continue to receive regular mammograms, as most breast cancers can be seen on a mammogram even for those with dense breast tissue. They should also discuss with their provider about considering any additional screening tests in addition to mammograms.

Those additional tests may include a digital breast tomosynthesis, or a 3D mammography, which some studies have shown may be helpful in finding cancers that are not seen on regular mammograms. Studies have also shown that ultrasounds or magnetic resonance imaging can also detect some breast cancers not seen on mammograms. Still, these additional tests can show more findings that are not cancer, leading to even more tests and unnecessary biopsies that may not be covered by insurance.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the American Cancer Society's "For the Love of... Get Screened" campaign is urging women to get screened for breast cancer - for the love of themselves, a family member, a friend or another special reason.

The American Cancer Society recommends women at average risk should start breast cancer screening by age 45, with an option to start at 40.

Regular mammograms are vital for all women, including those with dense breast tissue. Unfortunately, 36% of women are not up to date on breast cancer screening," said Dr. Kamal. If you or someone you know could be part of that 36%, we encourage you to get screened for the love of yourself or that person.

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