The American Cancer Society, American College of Radiology, Society of Breast Imaging and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, among others, recommend that all women have yearly mammograms beginning at age 40. Women at high risk may benefit from starting earlier.

For more information on breast cancer screening, visit MammographySavesLives.org or RadiologyInfo.org

To schedule a screening mammogram, breast ultrasound, or breast MRI contact the MidMichigan Health scheduling department at (888) 367-2778.
Ask Your Doctor Which Breast Cancer Screening Options are Right for You

What is breast density?
Breasts are made up of a mixture of fibrous and glandular tissue and fatty tissue. Your breasts are considered dense if you have a lot of fibrous or glandular tissue but not much fat. Density may decrease with age, but there is little, if any, change in most women.

Why is breast density important?
Having dense breast tissue may increase your risk of getting breast cancer. Dense breasts also make it more difficult for radiologists to spot cancer on mammograms. Dense tissue appears white on a mammogram. Lumps, both benign and cancerous, also appear white. So, mammograms can be less accurate in women with dense breasts. Therefore, it is important to know if you have dense breasts, so that you can talk to your health care provider about any additional screening exams that are right for you.

How do I know if I have dense breasts?
Breast density is determined by the radiologist who reads your mammogram. There are four categories of mammographic density. The radiologist assigns each mammogram to one of the categories. Your doctor should be able to tell you whether you have dense breasts based on where you fall on the density scale. (See scale below.)

If I have dense breasts, do I still need a mammogram?
Yes. A mammogram is the only medical imaging screening test proven to reduce breast cancer deaths. Many cancers are seen on mammograms even if you have dense breast tissue.

Are there any tests that are better than a mammogram for dense breasts?
In breasts that are dense, cancer can be hard to see on a mammogram. Studies have shown that ultrasound and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) can help find breast cancers that can’t be seen on a mammogram. However, both MRI and ultrasound show more findings that are not cancer, which can result in added testing and unnecessary biopsies. Also, the cost of ultrasound and MRI may not be covered by insurance.

What should I do if I have dense breasts? What if I don’t?
If you have dense breasts, please talk to your health care provider. Together, you can decide which, if any, additional screening exams are right for you. If your breasts are not dense, other factors may still place you at increased risk for breast cancer — including a family history of the disease, previous chest radiation treatment for cancer and previous breast biopsies that show you are high risk. Talk to your health care provider and discuss your history. Even if you are at low risk, and have entirely fatty breasts, you should still get an annual mammogram starting at age 40.

What is the Michigan dense breast notification law?
Effective June 1, 2015 mammography departments will be required to notify patients in their mammogram summary letter if they have heterogenous or extremely dense breasts. This information about the result of your mammogram is given to you to raise your awareness. You should use this information to discuss with your health care provider whether other supplemental tests in addition to your mammogram may be appropriate for you, based on your individual risk. A report of your results is also sent to your ordering health care provider.

What services does MidMichigan Health offer for additional dense breast screening?
MidMichigan Health offers screening breast ultrasound and breast MRI in addition to an annual screening mammogram. Ultrasound and MRI are supplemental screening tests and are not intended to be performed instead of an annual mammogram. They have only been proven to improve sensitivity in addition to a mammogram, which is the only imaging test proven to reduce breast cancer deaths. Additionally, many cancers are still visible on mammograms even in patients with dense breasts.

Breast density in the U.S.
- 10% of women have almost entirely fatty breasts
- 10% have extremely dense breasts
- 80% are classified into one of two middle categories