

Updated USPSTF Breast Cancer Screening Guidelines Do Not Go Far Enough

In JAMA Oncology, Dr. Wendie Berg Highlights Changing Guidelines and Need for Improved Dense Breast Screening

Long Island, N.Y., April 30, 2024 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) released updated recommendations for breast cancer screening today in *JAMA*. In a companion editorial in *JAMA Oncology*, “USPSTF Breast Cancer Screening Guidelines Do Not Go Far Enough,” Wendie Berg, MD, PhD, Professor of Radiology at University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and Chief Scientific Advisor for DenseBreast-info.org (DBI), commends the USPSTF for expanding potential benefits of screening mammography to start at age 40 but expresses concern about inadequate screening for women with dense breasts.

In the editorial, Dr. Berg focused on key advances and opportunities to enhance breast cancer screening guidelines moving forward, including:

- **Annual vs Biennial:** While an important step that USPSTF now supports regular screening beginning at age 40, it is surprising that the recommendations call for biennial mammography, which carries a smaller breast cancer mortality reduction (28.4%) vs annual mammography (35.2%).
- **Dense Breast Screening:** The USPSTF states that evidence is insufficient to support supplemental screening beyond mammography in women with dense breasts, but they ignored key evidence. Supplemental screening with MRI especially has proven benefits and is recognized by the American College of Radiology (ACR) and European Society of Breast Imaging (EUSOBI). In women who cannot have MRI, ultrasound can be considered.
- **High Risk:** The USPSTF guidelines do not apply to women at high risk of breast cancer. Many women with dense breasts and personal/family history are at high risk. ACR and EUSOBI endorse risk assessment at age 25 to identify women who may benefit from early initiation of screening MRI.

“The updated USPSTF updated recommendations are an important step forward, but they stop short. Research shows that not only is annual mammography as efficient as biennial, but it also delivers greater overall gains in years of life saved. We encourage USPSTF to consider annual screening and the commencement of regular risk assessment at age 25 to identify women at high risk due to family history or breast density who should consider supplemental screening, including MRI, or breast ultrasound if MRI is not possible,” said Dr. Berg.

As of September 10, 2024, the new FDA standard requires all women in the U.S. to be notified if they have dense breasts or not in their mammogram results letters. “For women to benefit from appropriate screening, they must participate and have a discussion with their medical provider about their breast density and other risk factors. DBI continues to focus on providing comprehensive education to support such conversations. Adequate breast cancer screening should be available to all women, and this will require passage of the Find It Early Act to assure a national standard for insurance coverage,” said JoAnn Pushkin, Executive Director, DBI.

DenseBreast-info.org, the world’s leading medically-sourced website on the topic, has grown from 40,000 visits in 2016 to an estimated one million in 2024. The website features educational tools for patients and health providers.

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