

IN A FEW YEARS, IT'S LIKELY THAT MAMMOGRAPHY WILL BE TAILORED AROUND BREAST DENSITY

search for genes responsible for breast density is a hot area in breast cancer research," says Apffelstaedt. "But the relationship of these individual genes with breast cancer risk has not been defined and tests for these genes are a long way off."

Meanwhile, digital mammography offers promising results for women with high breast density.

Until then, all women should be alert. Most women with dense breasts won't get cancer, but if you are worried, see your doctor and make sure you have a full investigation. "Remember, a lot of cancers are found early in women with dense breasts with mammography, especially full-field digital mammography and in combination with

Screening advice

The Cancer Association of South Africa advocates a mammogram every three years from age 35.

After age 40, discuss having one annually. "If you have a family history of breast cancer, start your screening ten years before your youngest relative developed breast cancer, and also have breast MRI scans," advises Dr Carol-Ann Benn, specialist surgeon at Netcare's Breast Care Centre for Excellence in Johannesburg.

In many women, breast density decreases as they age – although about a third of women who had dense breasts in their youth will continue to do so after menopause.

ultrasound," says Apffelstaedt. "We're just talking about relative differences here."

"It's a devastating experience being diagnosed with breast cancer, but life can and does go on after diagnosis, especially if it's caught early," says Christine, who is now clear.

"It's been quite a journey from that night in the shower when I thought: *Oh, is that a lump? Hmmm, yes, definitely a lump.*" ■