



Metastatic malignant melanoma revisited

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Learning objectives

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

To present an organ-by-organ review of the various CT appearances of malignant melanoma in the head and neck, chest, abdomen, and musculoskeletal system.

Fig.

References: C. Paulino; Serviço de Imagiologia, Hospitais da Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra, PORTUGAL

Background

BACKGROUND

- Beside all the efforts of public health campaigns, incidence rate of malignant melanoma has been *increasing* in Europe over the past decades.
- Malignant melanoma is an aggressive neoplasm that *can* involve virtually every organ system, assuming a wide variety of appearances.
- The most common sites of metastases are the *lungs*, *liver*, and *central nervous system*.

Fig.

PATHOPHYSIOLOGY

- Initially melanoma spreads *locally* and then to *regional lymph* nodes in a predictable fashion.
- Haematogenous metastatic disease occurs via vertical local spread to blood vessels in the dermis or via lymphatic spread to blood vessels in local lymph nodes.
- There is often a long latent period between the time of diagnosis of the primary tumor and the development of metastasis (as late as 15-20 years, although the majority of metastases are seen within 2-5 years of initial diagnosis).
- Even years after resection of skin melanoma, the possibility of metastases should be considered in the symptomatic patient and imaging arranged accordingly.

Fig.

STAGING

- Initial staging is surgically defined following wide local excision.
- US can be used early to assess regional draining lymph nodes and to guide fine needle aspiration.
- Sentinel node lymphoscintigraphy allows identification and precise localisation of potentially involved lymph node basins.

Fig.

STAGING

- In tumors ≥ 4 mm at initial presentation, or thinner tumors with clinical evidence of nodal spread, an enhanced CT Chest/Abdomen/Pelvis is required for further evaluation.
- If disseminated disease is suspected then CT of the brain and neck is also performed.
- CT is the most widely used modality for tumour staging and follow-up. However, other techniques can be useful in difficult cases.

Fig.

STAGING

- FDG-PET is most useful in the evaluation of patients with advanced-stage melanoma or in recurrent disease.
- FDG-PET is more accurate than CT alone in re-staging and follow up.

Fig.

References: C. Paulino; Serviço de Imagiologia, Hospitais da Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra, PORTUGAL

Imaging findings OR Procedure details

1. LYMPH NODES

- The nodal distribution usually depends on the location of the patient's primary tumor and its lymphatic drainage.
- Often, the distribution and extent of nodal involvement can simulate that of lymphoma.
- Metastatic nodal disease is manifest as enlarged rounded nodes with loss of the normal fatty hilum and abnormal vascularity.
- These features are demonstrated on both US and CT.

Fig.

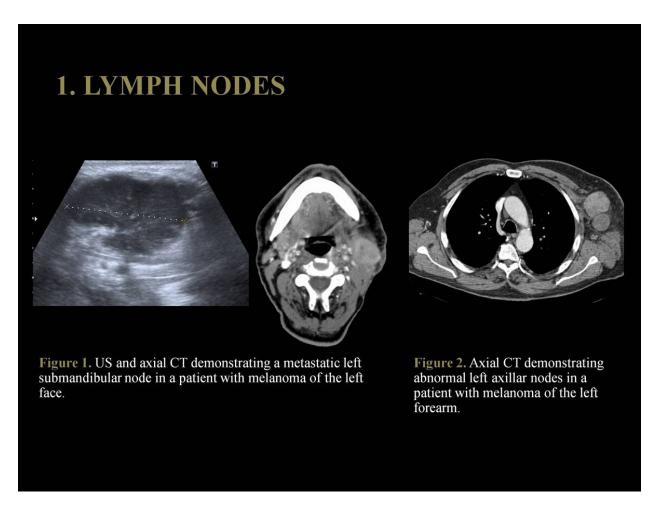


Fig. References: C. Paulino; Serviço de Imagiologia, Hospitais da Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra, PORTUGAL

HEAD

 Melanoma metastatic to the head can involve virtually any intracranial or extracranial structure, including the meninges, orbit, nasopharynx, internal auditory canal, choroid plexus, bone, and muscle. However, the brain is the most common site of metastases to the head from melanoma.

Fig.

BRAIN

- Melanoma is associated with <u>hemorrhagic brain</u> <u>metastases</u>.
- The CT features usually consist of single or multiple nodules of increased attenuation that enhance after contrast.
- These metastases are often located in the gray matter or at the subcortical gray-white matter junction surrounded by varying amounts of edema.

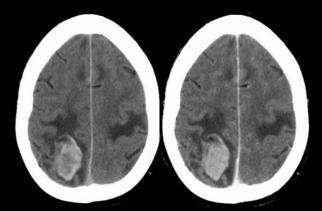


Figure 3. Axial pre and postcontrast CT images demonstrating areas of increased attenuation in the precontrast scan that enhanced after contrast infusion.

Fig.

BRAIN

- On MRI, two classic imaging patterns have been described for melanoma metastatic to the brain based on signal intensity characteristics:
 - the melanotic form is characterized by T1 hyperintensity and T2 hypointensity;
 - the amelanotic form is characterized by T1 hypointensity and T2 hyperintensity.
- Other patterns include small and rapidly growing metastases, miliary metastases, and subependymal metastases.

Fig.

BRAIN

- The differential diagnosis for an intraparenchymal hematoma in a melanoma patient includes:
 - primarily hypertensive hemorrhage;
 - vascular anomalies (including arteriovenous malformation and cavernous malformation);
 - hemorrhagic infarction;
 - amyloid angiopathy;
 - trauma;
 - other hemorrhagic neoplasms (e.g. lung, breast, thyroid, renal cell and choriocarcinoma).

Fig.

BRAIN

- Imaging features on **MRI** that suggest hemorrhagic neoplasm rather than benign intraparenchymal hematoma includes:
 - a heterogeneous or mixed intensity pattern;
 - an incomplete hemosiderin rim;
 - disproportionately large amount of edema compared with hematoma size, persistence of or increase in the edema over several days or weeks;
 - persistence of T2 hypointensity beyond the expected time for a nonneoplastic hematoma;
 - initial appearance of T1 hyperintensity (subacute methemoglobin) centrally or eccentrically in the hematoma.

Fig.

THYROID

- Metastases to the thyroid are rare.
- Metastatic disease hasn't a characteristic sonographic appearance, but it should be considered when a solid thyroid nodule is identified in a patient with a known extrathyroidal malignancy.



Figure 4. Longitudinal view of the right lobe of the thyroid shows a slightly lobulated solid predominately hypoechoic nodule. This patient had a history of melanoma and fine-needle aspiration confirmed metastatic melanoma to the thyroid.

Fig. References: C. Paulino; Serviço de Imagiologia, Hospitais da Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra, PORTUGAL

LUNG

- Malignant melanoma has a high propensity for metastases to the lung. Respiratory failure caused by replacement of lung tissue by tumor is in fact the most common cause of death from malignant melanoma.
- The **CT** appearance of lung metastases is variable. Although most lesions are in the range of 1-2 cm, others are less than 0,6 cm or more than 5 cm in size.

Fig.

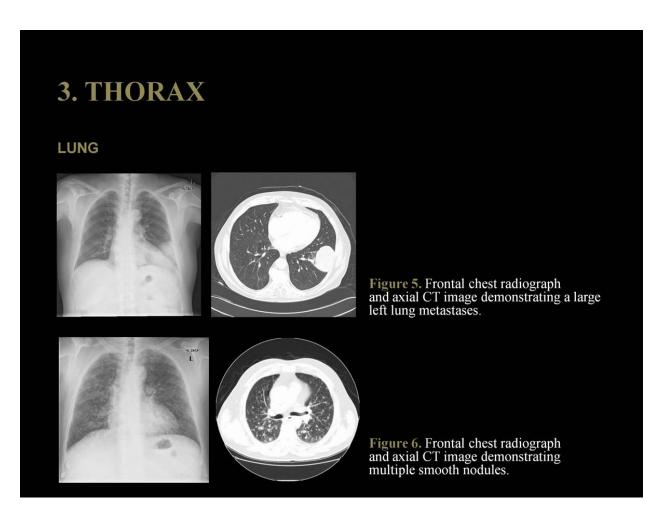


Fig.References: C. Paulino; Serviço de Imagiologia, Hospitais da Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra, PORTUGAL

PLEURA

 Metastatic disease to the pleura commonly causes irregular or lobulated pleural thickening, usually in association with a pleural effusion.



Figure 7. Axial CT image shows pleural metastases with lobulated pleural thickening.

Fig.

BREAST

- Breast metastases from nonmammary primary tumors are uncommon, representing 0.5-2.0% of all breast malignancies.
- The most common primary cancer to produce breast metastases is melanoma.

Fig.

BREAST

- At mammography, metastases may manifest as single or multiple masses or as diffuse skin thickening (edema pattern).
- Metastases usually appear as round masses with circumscribed or ill-defined borders.
- Irregular shape, spiculations, and microcalcifications may be seen but are rare.



Figure 8. Metastatic melanoma: left mediolateral oblique mammogram shows a round mass with circumscribed borders.

Fig.

BREAST

 At US, metastases tend to have circumscribed margins with low-level internal echoes and, occasionally, posterior acoustic enhancement.



Figure 9. Metastatic melanoma: ultrasound image a hypoechoic nodule with circumscribed margins.

Fig.

BREAST

- Metastatic lesions are much more likely to be multiple or bilateral than primary cancers.
- Metastases are often found in the subcutaneous fat, whereas primary breast cancers develop in the glandular tissue.
- Metastases do not tend to cause retraction of the skin or nipple.
- At palpation, metastases feel similar in size to their appearance at mammography; in contrast, primary breast cancers tend to feel larger than their mammographic appearance.

Fig.

LIVER

- The liver is the most frequent site of visceral involvement with metastatic melanoma.
- Lesions can be single or multiple and variable in size (5 mm to 15 cm). Metastases can be solid or cystic and may be partly calcified.
 Larger lesions are often necrotic.

Fig.

LIVER

- US shows predominantly hypoechoic lesions within the liver. However, these appearance are non-specific.
- Contrast-enhanced US can be helpful, demonstrating early arterial phase enhancement.



Figure 10. Transversal greyscale ultrasound image demonstrating numerous diffuse hypoechoic lesions.

Fig.

LIVER

- Hepatic metastases are usually detected as low attenuation lesions on portal venous phase CT.
- A proportion of these hypervascular lesions are only visible on arterial phase CT and remain undetected if the liver is only scanned in the portal venous phase.

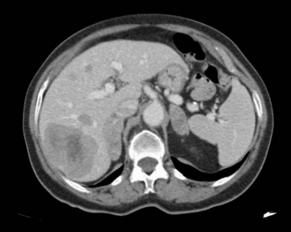


Figure 11. Axial CT image demonstrating a large necrotic melanomatous deposit within the right lobe of the liver and other smaller diffuse lesions. In addition there are bilateral adrenal deposits.

Fig.

LIVER

- The differential diagnosis for a solitary hypervascular liver lesion in a melanoma patient includes: melanoma metastasis, haemangioma, hepatocellular carcinoma, focal nodular hyperplasia, hepatic adenoma and other hypervascular metastases (e.g. islet cell tumours, carcinoid, renal cell carcinoma and breast carcinoma).
- In patients without involvement of regional draining nodes, melanoma metastases are rare and further investigation with standard or dynamic contrast-enhanced MRI is recommended.

Fig.

LIVER

- Melanoma deposits are typically hyperintense on T1 W sequences due to their melanin content.
- However, the lack of melanin does not exclude a melanomatous deposit (e.g. amelanocytic melanoma, undifferentiated tumours).
- Metastases typically demonstrate avid arterial enhancement on dynamic imaging.

Fig.

SPLEEN

 Splenic metastases are usually multiple, can be cystic or solid and range in size from a few millimetres to over 8 cm.



Figure 12. Axial post-contrast CT imaging demonstrating a large necrotic melanomatous deposit within the spleen.

Fig.

KIDNEY

- Melanoma is the third most common metastasis found in the kidney (after lung and breast).
- Renal metastases are typically small, multiple and cortical in position.
- Spread to the urothelium (collecting system or bladder) is seen less frequently.

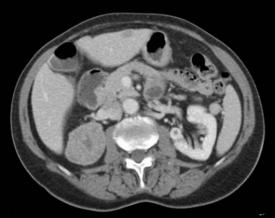
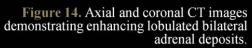


Figure 13. Axial post-contrast CT image demonstrating a large melanomatous deposit within the upper pole of the right kidney.

Fig.

ADRENALS

- Adrenal metastases may be unilateral or bilateral and can be variable in size but are usually in the range of 4-6 cm.
- Adrenal metastases appear as non-specific, lobulated masses with heterogeneous enhancement on CT.



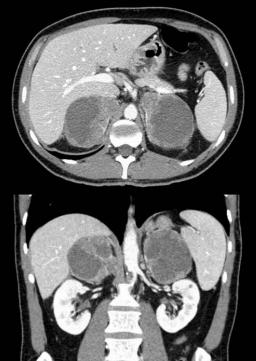


Fig.

ADRENALS

- Adrenal metastases can be differentiated from adrenal adenomas on MRI.
- Adrenal adenomas demonstrate signal drop-out on out-of-phase MRI when compared to in-phase imaging.
- Melanoma metastasis demonstrate no loss of signal on out-of-phase MRI.

Fig.

GALLBLADDER

- Metastatic involvement of the gallbladder in melanoma is rare, but constitutes the most common metastatic lesion involving this organ.
- The differential diagnosis includes adenomatous, hyperplastic, and cholesterol polyps; carcinoid tumor, gallbladder carcinoma and a hematoma within the gallbladder.



Figure 15. Coronal CT image demonstrating a polypoid mass within the gallbladder.

Fig.

GASTROINTESTINAL TRACT

 Metastasis to the GI tract are relatively uncommon, with the stomach and small bowel being most frequently affected.



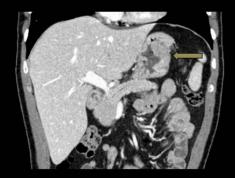


Figure 16. Axial and coronal CT images in a patient with metastatic disease involving the stomach, demonstrating diffuse infiltration with wall thickening.

Fig. *References:* C. Paulino; Serviço de Imagiologia, Hospitais da Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra, PORTUGAL

SMALL BOWEL

- The lesions are more common in the distal jejunum or ileum than in the proximal small bowel.
- Metastases classically manifest as enhancing mural nodules protruding into the intestinal lumen or as focal thickening of the intestinal wall.
- Small bowel metastases can act as a lead point for intussusception, cause obstruction or haemorrhage.



Figure 17. Axial post-contrast CT image demonstrating a small bowel metastase acting as a lead point for intussusception.

Fig.

MESENTERY

- Deposits in the mesentery results in masses that vary in size and can measure as large as 25 cm.
- The mesenteric masses seen in melanoma incite little desmoplastic response, unlike carcinoid or small bowel adenocarcinoma. In certain instances, therefore, lymphoma enters the differential diagnosis.

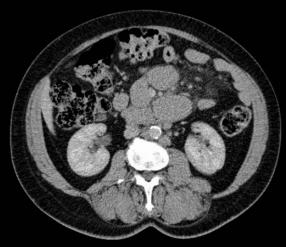


Figure 18. Axial post-contrast CT image demonstrating mesenteric metastasis.

Fig.

PERITONEUM

- The preferential sites for tumor implantation are the pelvic culde-sac, right paracolic gutter, and the greater omentum.
- CT demonstrates tumor nodules on peritoneal surfaces which displace bowel away from the anterior abdominal wall, tumor nodules in the mesentery, thickening and nodularity of the bowel wall owing to serosal implants, and ascites that is commonly loculated.



Figure 19. Axial post-contrast CT image shows solid tumor implanted on the omentum creating "omental cake".

Fig.

PELVIS

- The uterus and ovaries are more commonly and extensively involved with metastatic disease than the male genital tract.
- The commonest sites are the ovaries with unilateral or bilateral deposits which can be solid, cystic or mixed.



Figure 20. Axial post-contrast CT image shows bilateral ovarian deposits.

Fig.

BONE

- Bone metastases are a frequent finding in patients with disseminated disease.
- The axial skeleton is most commonly affected.
- Metastasis are generally osteolytic, with or without an associated soft-tissue mass.



Figure 21. Axial CT images showing destructive, osteolytic metastasis involving one left rib (in addition there is a pulmonary metastase) and the sacrum.

Fig.

MUSCLE

- Metastatic melanoma may arise in or extend directly into underlying muscle.
- On contrast-enhanced CT scans, these lesions may appear hyperattenuated relative to normal muscle.



Figure 22. Axial CT images showing a metastasis involving the right gluteus muscle.

Fig.

CUTANEOUS / SUBCUTANEOUS DEPOSITS

- Cutaneous and subcutaneous deposits are frequent.
- The primary lesion is often associated with satellite lesions or early cutaneous metastasis.
- US: hypoechoic, smooth or lobulated masses with distal acoustic enhancement +/- internal arterial flow.



Figure 23. Ultrasound image demonstrating a subcutaneous nodule.

Fig.

CUTANEOUS / SUBCUTANEOUS DEPOSITS

• CT: non-specific, well defined, enhancing soft-tissue density nodules.

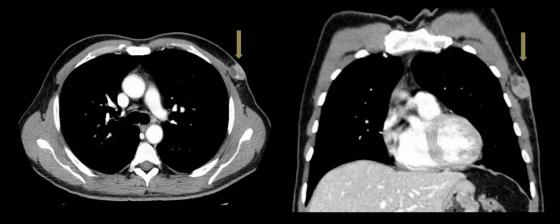


Figure 24. Axial and coronal CT images illustrating a subcutaneous deposit in left thoracic wall.

Fig.

References: C. Paulino; Serviço de Imagiologia, Hospitais da Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra, PORTUGAL

Conclusion

CONCLUSION

Metastatic malignant melanoma can have a wide variety of appearances in the head and neck, chest, abdomen, and the musculoskeletal system. Awareness of the these various appearances and their potential overlap with those of other disease states allows a more precise staging. In light of the introduction of newer therapeutic regimens in melanoma, accurate staging is critical in the proper treatment of the patient.

Fig.

References: C. Paulino; Serviço de Imagiologia, Hospitais da Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra, PORTUGAL

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