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Imaging Findings in Cirrhotic Liver: Pearls and Pitfalls for Diagnosis of Focal Benign and Malignant Lesions

Abstract

Cirrhosis is the end stage of chronic liver disease and causes architectural distortion and perfusional anomalies. It is a major risk factor for developing hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC). Common disease entities in noncirrhotic livers, such as hemangiomas, can be rare in cirrhotic livers, and benign entities such as confluent hepatic fibrosis and focal nodular hyperplasia-like lesions may mimic the appearance of malignancies,. HCC usually has typical imaging characteristics, such as the major features established by the Liver Imaging Reporting and Data System. However, HCC can also have a spectrum of atypical or uncommon appearances, such as cystic HCC, hypovascular HCC, or macroscopic fat-containing HCC. HCCs with certain genetic mutations such as CTNNB-1-mutated HCC can harbor unique imaging features not seen in other types of HCC. In addition, malignancies that are less common than HCC, such as cholangiocarcinoma and metastases, which can be difficult to differentiate, can still occur in cirrhotic livers. Atypical imaging features of benign and malignant lesions can be challenging to accurately diagnose. Therefore, familiarity with these features and an understanding of the prevalence of disease entities in cirrhotic livers are key in the daily practice of radiologists for evaluation of cirrhotic livers. The authors illustrate the typical and atypical features of benign and malignant lesions in cirrhosis and discuss the technical pitfalls and unique advantages associated with various imaging modalities in assessing cirrhotic livers, including noncontrast and contrast-enhanced US, CT, and MRI. Work of the U.S. Government published under an exclusive license with the RSNA. Quiz questions for this article are available in the supplemental material.

Biography

Dr. Amjad Abbas is a dedicated medical professional with extensive clinical experience and a strong commitment to patient-centered care. Based in the United Kingdom, he has developed a solid background in his field through continuous training, hands-on practice, and active participation in multidisciplinary healthcare environments. Dr. Abbas is recognized for his professional work ethic, attention to detail, and ability to collaborate effectively with colleagues to ensure high-quality medical outcomes.

He has contributed to clinical services through evidence-based practice and maintains a keen interest in ongoing medical education, research engagement, and professional development. Dr. Abbas continues to expand his expertise by attending workshops, conferences, and training programs aligned with the latest advancements in healthcare.

Dedicated, compassionate, and driven by a commitment to excellence, Dr. Amjad Abbas remains focused on advancing his skills while contributing meaningfully to the medical community.

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