



How Many Malignant Lung Nodules Can We Ablate

Thermal ablation of malignant lung nodules with radiofrequency ablation (RFA) or microwave ablation (MWA) is a common procedure. RFA for the lung was first used in Mumbai almost 20 years ago in 2004. Microwave ablation is a more recent technique. Both use heat to destroy tumor cells.

Traditionally, RFA and MWA have been used to ablate one or at the most two nodules. Recently, there has been an increase in the number of nodules ablated per patient (Figs. 1, 2).

Theoretically there is no upper limit to the number of nodules that can be ablated per patient, however the positioning (supine, prone, decubitus), the sedation/anesthesia and complications of pneumothorax and bleeding will limit the number of ablations, usually to 2-3 nodules at the most in one sitting, with multiple sittings, if there are more nodules.

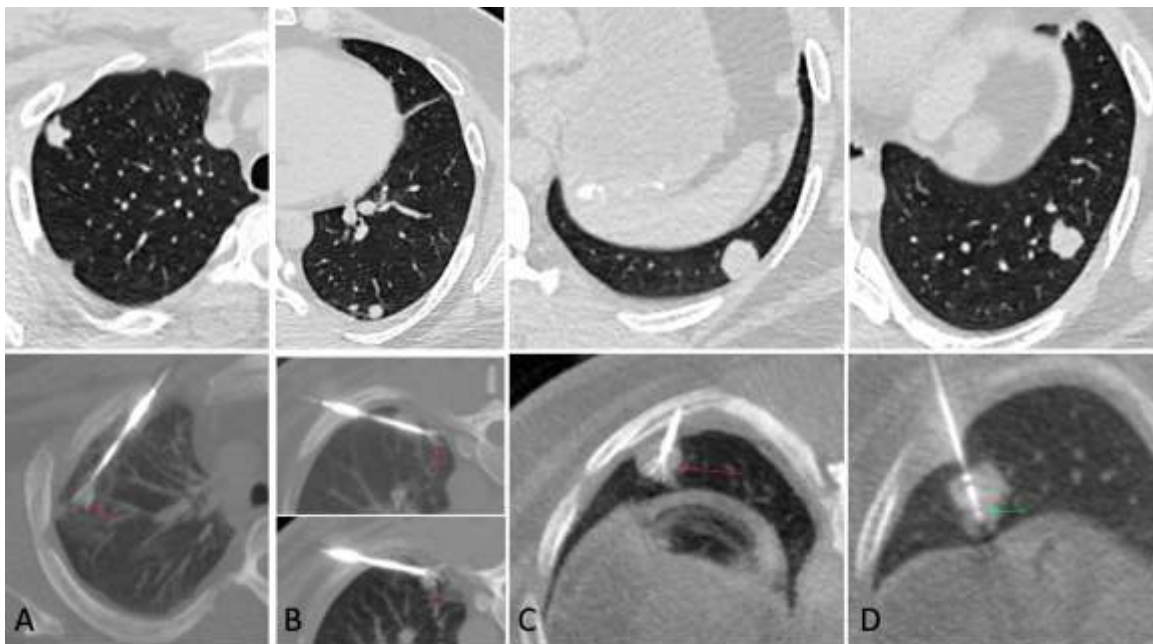


Fig.1(A-D): 28-years old with 5 metastatic nodules from carcinoma thyroid. The first ablation (A) was an RFA of the right upper lobe nodule in the supine position, using an oblique approach (arrow). The 2nd ablation (B), 15 days later was an RFA of the two nodules at the junction of the superior and posterior basal segments of the left lower lobe in the prone position. First, the more medial and then the lateral nodule were ablated in one sitting. Ablation of the 4th nodule was attempted but abandoned because of breath control issues. The 3rd ablation (C) of the 4th nodule in the posterior basal segment of the left lower lobe was again an RFA, 13 days later in the prone position, followed by microwave ablation of the 5th nodule (D) at the junction of the posterior and lateral basal segments of the left lower lobe after another 36 days, also in the prone position. Hence 5 nodules were ablated in 4 sittings over a total of just over 2 months. A follow-up PET/CT, 1 month after the last ablation showed complete absence of uptake in all the nodules, suggesting successful ablation.



At a glance

- ◆ Thermal ablation of malignant lung nodules is an acceptable mode of treatment, complementing chemotherapy.
- ◆ Multiple lung nodules can be safely ablated in one or multiple sittings.

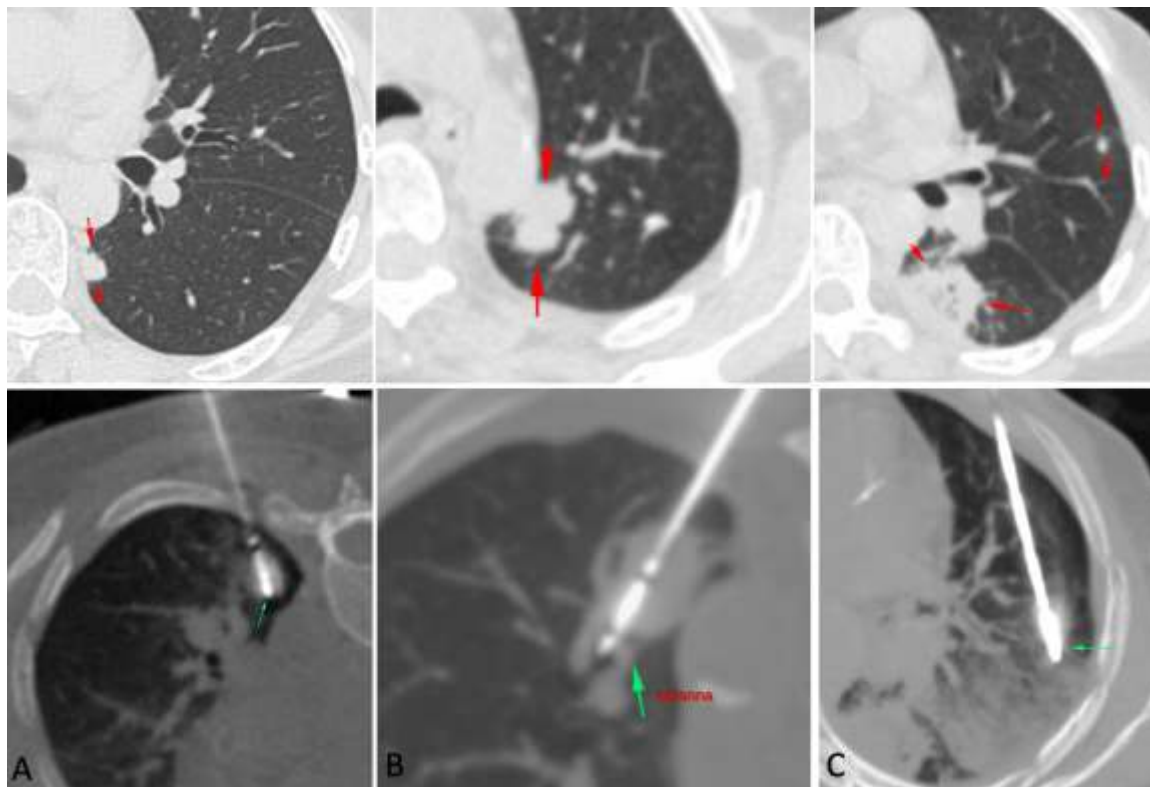


Fig. 2 (A-C): 59-years old with 3 metastatic nodules from carcinoma breast. Microwave ablation was done for all 3 nodules. The first ablation (A) was of the nodule in the superior segment of the lower lobe of the left lung, in the prone position preceded by a biopsy. The 2nd nodule in the posterior segment of the upper lobe of the left lung increased in size in the interim 16 days and was ablated in the prone position, followed by ablation of the 3rd nodule (C) in the supine position, 5 more days later. Hence 3 nodules were ablated in 3 sitting over a total of 21 days.

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