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## [Gastrointestinal Stromal Tumor - GIST - Risk Factors](#) [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 12/2015

**ON THIS PAGE:** You will find out more about the factors that increase the chance of developing this type of tumor. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen.

A risk factor is anything that increases a person's chance of developing a tumor. Although risk factors often influence the development of a tumor, most do not directly cause the disease. Some people with several risk factors never develop a tumor, while others with no known risk factors do. However, knowing your risk factors and talking about them with your doctor may help you make more informed health care choices.

The majority of GISTs develop sporadically, which means for no known reason. Doctors are rarely able to find a specific risk factor for patients diagnosed with a GIST, other than the hereditary syndromes discussed below. However, the following factors may raise a person's risk for developing a GIST:

- **Age.** GIST most often occurs in people older than 50.
- **Gender.** GIST is slightly more common in men than in women.
- **Hereditary risk.** GIST rarely run in families, and having a family member with a GIST seldom increases your risk of developing the disease. Hereditary syndromes that *can* increase the risk of GIST include [familial GIST](#) [3], [neurofibromatosis Type 1](#) [4] (NF1), and

Carney-Stratakis dyad.

- **Genetics.** Most often GIST develops because of genetic mutations or changes. This includes non-hereditary tumors. The two most common genes affected are called *KIT* and *platelet-derived growth factor receptor alpha (PDGFRA)*. A tumor may have a different mutation to these genes, some of which are more harmful than others. The prognosis of people with different mutations is often different. The tumors of patients with GIST that do not have mutations recognized by current tests are called “wild type” (WT) tumors.

Increasingly, researchers are finding other mutations thought to cause GIST. One is a protein called succinate dehydrogenase (SDH). Another is *BRAF*, a gene occasionally changed in people with melanoma or colorectal cancer.

Testing for these mutations may be available at hospitals that specialize in treating a GIST. Researchers continue to look for specific genes and other syndromes that may be related to the development of GIST and which may be used to help choose a patient’s treatment options.

Because no non-hereditary, preventable risk factors have been found, there is no good way to prevent GIST.

*The [next section in this guide is Symptoms and Signs](#) [5] and it explains what body changes or medical problems this disease can cause. Or, use the menu on the side of your screen to choose another section to continue reading this guide.*

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## Links

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/gastrointestinal-stromal-tumor-gist/risk-factors>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/34601>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19450>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18873>