

[Gastrointestinal Stromal Tumor - GIST - Stages](#) [1]

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

ON THIS PAGE: You will learn about how doctors describe a tumor's growth or spread. This is called the stage. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen.

Staging is a way of describing where the tumor is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting other parts of the body. Doctors use diagnostic tests to find out the tumor's stage, so staging may not be complete until all the tests are finished. Knowing the stage helps the doctor to decide what kind of treatment is best and can help predict a patient's prognosis, which is the chance of recovery. There are different stage descriptions for different types of cancer.

For other types of GI tumors, the most common staging tool used is called the TNM system. TNM is an abbreviation for tumor (T), node (N), and metastasis (M). However, the use of the TNM system for GIST is not required. Instead, doctors look at different factors to determine a patient's prognosis and the specific risk of how aggressive an individual tumor will be. Specifically, doctors want to figure out how quickly the GIST may grow and the chance the tumor will come back, or recur, after surgery.

Doctors commonly use the factors listed below to determine how aggressive a GIST that has been removed could be:

- The size of the tumor
- The mitotic count, which describes the number of dividing cells

- The location where the tumor started

A GIST that has spread to distant areas of the body is considered higher risk because of the likelihood of it coming back.

Information about the cancer's stage will help the doctor recommend a specific treatment plan. The [next section in this guide is Treatment Options](#) [3]. Or, use the menu on the side of your screen to choose another section to continue reading this guide.

Links

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

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

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18876>