



How is GIST to be pronounced? Like a ginger

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Dear Editor,

Gastrointestinal stromal tumors (GISTs) are neoplastic diseases with malignant potential, and their management is of considerable importance to oncological care providers. Despite significant advancements, a consensus regarding the optimal treatment of GISTs has yet to be fully established. This ongoing uncertainty continues to attract clinical attention, as evidenced by the number of related articles published in this journal (1,2).

This brings me to a lighter, albeit intriguing, observation: How do readers pronounce the term “GIST” when they first encounter it? Personally, as a Japanese surgeon, I have consistently pronounced it as “Jist,” with the initial syllable “GI” sounding like “jih.” However, over the course of my career, I have noticed that a significant number of professionals pronounce “GI” as “gui” instead. This variation is not confined to a single field; I have encountered it in surgery, internal medicine, pathology, and even basic science disciplines.

Which pronunciation is correct: “Jist” or “Guist”? Interestingly, the English word *gist*—spelled identically—means “the main point” or “essence,” and is pronounced /dʒɪst/ (3). This would seem to support the “Jist” pronunciation.

Although the “Jist” camp appears to have the upper hand, uncertainty remains. One might reasonably ask: If *gift* is pronounced /ɡɪft/, shouldn't GIST logically be /ɡɪst/? This question prompted me to examine how the “gi” combination is generally pronounced in English, leading me on a brief exploration of linguistic history (4). Here is what I found:

- The letter *g* was originally pronounced as a hard “g” (as in *go*) in Latin.
- Over time, when followed by *e* or *i*, it often shifted to a soft “g” sound—ginger being a classic example.
- Words such as *get* and *give* retain the hard “g,” but they are exceptions; *gift* also falls into this category.
- To preserve the hard “g” before an *e* or *i*, English often inserts a *u*, as seen in *guilty* or *guess*.

Based on these linguistic patterns, the pronunciation “Jist” for GIST is both defensible and phonetically reasonable. Having considered the matter in some depth, I now feel confident in referring to the tumor as “Jist.” Admittedly, it can require a bit of courage to say “Jist” after a colleague has confidently said “Guist,” but I am prepared to summon that courage and declare—perhaps proudly, and with a slightly smug smile—“Jist.”

Footnotes

Financial Disclosure: The author declared that this study received no financial support.

Cite this article as: Urabe M. How is GIST to be pronounced? Like a ginger. *Turk J Surg.* 2026;42(2):279-280

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Received: 22.05.2025

Accepted: 24.06.2025

Epub: 12.03.2026

Publication Date: 04.06.2026

DOI: 10.47717/turkjsurg.2025.2025-5-17

Available at www.turkjsurg.com



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