

# Tisha's Story



She loves to tango. She loves to swing. Tisha has always loved to dance, but after she was diagnosed with high blood pressure, she thought learning a few new dance moves might keep her health from spinning out of control.

A year ago, Tisha thought she was pretty healthy, despite a junk food diet. Then one day she was dizzy and couldn't get her balance. When her computer screen seemed blurry, she told herself she needed new glasses. "I didn't want to accept that something could be wrong. I finally went to the doctor, and when I walked in my blood pressure was 190 over 120. I was a walking stroke."

Tisha's mother has had high blood pressure since an early age, her grandmother died of complications from heart failure and her father had recently had a heart attack. "We found out that high blood pressure can run in families.. It's like getting your mom's eyes or her smile."

Now Tisha controls the risk factors that she can. She stays physically active by doing something she loves – dancing. "I started with salsa and mambo and now I'm enrolled in ballroom classes," she said. "It was important for me to find something that I loved because I get bored easily. I'm the first one on the dance floor and the last one off."

Tisha has made other positive lifestyle changes too, as well as taking blood pressure medication. Gaining control has been key – on and off the dance floor.

"I've learned that if you can control your body and what you put in your mouth, you can control anything, like saying 'no' to that bag of salty chips. I'm not a saint all the time, but I do make wiser choices. I've learned that if I control what I eat, everything else is a piece of cake – no pun intended!"

Tisha said she's a Go Red For Women supporter for African-American women who don't know that heart disease is women's No. 1 killer. "I'd love to help educate them so more lives can be saved. Someone needs to hear my story – I'm a tall, full-figured but average woman who has the privilege to do an extraordinary thing. My hope is that someone will be better off just because I lived through this."

The dance floor's not for everyone. But Tisha has found that simple changes in everyday routines work wonders.

"Little things make a big difference, and so many people don't know that. From changing your printer at work to the other side of the room versus just pulling it out from under your desk, or parking farther away – every little bit helps."

As founder and president of her church's health ministry, T.E.M.P.L.E. (Teaching Each Member to Physically Live Exceptionally), Tisha's faith has also helped her live a heart-healthy lifestyle. "I started this ministry as a result of my health issues. I felt it's important to educate my community on health and wellness. We do seminars and workshops that promote healthy living and an active lifestyle."

With Go Red For Women, "There's always someone to pick you up. It's almost like a sorority where no matter where I am, I'll have someone in St. Louis or Texas or anywhere who will understand. Our community is so important. There's an old African proverb, 'It takes a village to raise a child,' and I don't think this is very different. It takes a community to support you in the fight against heart disease."



**Tisha - Brooklyn, NY**  
**Age: 32**  
**Age at time of diagnosis: 31**