- Avoid making any life-changing decisions, long-term commitments or changes. You may regret them when you are feeling better.
- Speak to your doctor, or make an appointment to see a counsellor.

If you are diagnosed with depression you may be prescribed antidepressant medication. Remember depression is an illness like any other and is ***treatable.***

## Helping a Depressed Friend

When trying to help a friend, do not try to "cheer up" the individual or tell them to "snap out of it. Do not criticize or shame, as feelings of depression cannot be helped. Try not to get angry with the depressed person. Let them know you are willing to help. If there are thoughts of suicide or if the depression appears to be getting in the way of daily functioning urge the individual to get professional help. If the person resists, seek help and advice from the doctors or counsellors at the Health Centre as to how to proceed.

Adapted from: ***Understanding Depression*** – A publication of the Counseling Centre of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA.

Prepared by: *Dr Angela Gordon Stair for:*
*The University Counselling Service (UCS)*
*Room 14, UWI Health Centre*
*11 Gibraltar Camp Way*
*Telephone: 970-1992/927-2520*
*Campus Extns. 2270/2370*
*UCS Website:*
*www.mona.uwi.edu/healthcentre/counsellingunit*

# What is Depression?

**Depression is more than the blues. It is not a personal or emotional weakness. It is a serious medical illness that affects millions of persons worldwide.**

## Symptoms of depression include:

- Finding it hard to get motivated and feel interested in things
- Wanting to avoid friends and everyday activities
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Losing interest in eating, or overeating
- Losing weight, without dieting, or gaining weight
- Finding it difficult to get to sleep, waking during the night, or waking too early and not being able to get back to sleep. Alternatively, wanting to sleep all the time.
- Thinking about, or planning suicide
- Having unpleasant, negative thoughts (like feeling guilty or that you are a bad or unworthy person)
- Getting pains in your body or headaches that don't seem to have any physical cause.

## Causes of Depression

Depression is often the result of an unhappy event such as the death of a loved one, the ending of a relationship or even retirement. When the source of the depressed feelings is obvious, it is likely that the reaction will disappear within a reasonable time. If however the cause of the depression is unclear or there is no apparent source, then it may get worse and last longer.

Any number of stressors may be involved in depression. These can include

- Personality
- Environmental factors
- Biochemical imbalances in the brain. Such imbalances may be created by illness, infections, certain drugs(including alcohol, marijuana and even prescribed medications).

## Helping Yourself

Be honest with yourself about changes in mood or the intensity of negative feelings you are experiencing. This will help you to identify possible sources of depression or stress. Examine your

feelings and try to determine what is troubling you. Is it the relationship with family, friends or a partner? Are you worried about your finances etc? Talking with the people involved or with some one whom you trust can often point you in the right direction and so bring about a resolution before you become too depressed. You might also want to:

- Take a break from your normal routine and do something you enjoy even if you don't feel like it.
- Do some form of exercise. This helps to relax you and improve your sleep.