

Complex PTSD

Prolonged or repeated trauma turns PTSD into complex PTSD

Complex post-traumatic stress disorder (complex PTSD) is a psychological condition caused by prolonged or frequent exposure to traumatic events.

PTSD is generally related to a single event, while complex PTSD is related to a series of events or one prolonged event. Symptoms of PTSD or complex PTSD can arise after any traumatic episode, such as a car crash, an earthquake, or a sexual assault.¹

"PTSD is a clinical diagnosis, meaning that there are no lab tests or X-rays that confirm the diagnosis. Rather, a mental health professional will discuss your symptoms and experiences and make the diagnosis based on certain criteria," according to Steven Gans, MD, a medical expert on the staff of Best Doctors.

"The hallmark feature of PTSD is exposure to one or more traumatic events. Not everyone who experiences a trauma will develop PTSD," he added.

Symptoms can include:

- reliving the trauma through flashbacks and nightmares
- avoiding situations that resemble the trauma
- dizziness or nausea
- hyperarousal, which means being in a continual state of high alert
- the belief that the world is a dangerous place
- a loss of trust in one's self or others
- difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- being startled by loud noises

Along with the trauma, there must be some way in which the traumatic event is re-experienced in recurrent and distressing ways, according to Dr. Gans. In addition, there is also:

- avoidance of reminders of the trauma
- negative impacts on mood and thinking associated with the trauma
- physical symptoms of increased reactivity and being "on guard"

Treatment for complex PTSD usually involves "trauma-focused" psychotherapies that examine the experience of the trauma and help the patient to more effectively process and face their trauma. These include cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), cognitive processing therapy (CPT), and prolonged exposure therapy (PE), among others.

Additionally, certain medications, such as some of the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) antidepressants, can sometimes be helpful in reducing PTSD symptoms.

Complex PTSD is a relatively recent concept. Because of its variable nature, healthcare professionals may instead diagnose another condition. They may be especially likely to diagnose borderline personality disorder (BPD).

Living with the aftermath of a trauma is difficult enough, without the uncertainty of whether your diagnosis is correct. If you have been diagnosed with any of these conditions, your Best Doctors benefits are the ideal source of second opinions offered by our medical experts. With a comprehensive, objective review of your case, you can have the peace of mind that comes from meticulous, detailed research that can either confirm or refute your diagnosis.

¹<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/322886.php>

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