



H E A L T H
N E T W O R K

What is the difference between PTSD and C-PTSD?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and **Complex PTSD (C-PTSD)** are related conditions, both stemming from exposure to traumatic events. However, they differ in the nature and scope of the trauma, as well as in the symptoms they present.

1. Nature of Trauma:

- **PTSD:** Typically arises from a single, identifiable traumatic event, such as a car accident, natural disaster, or assault.
- **C-PTSD:** Results from prolonged, repeated trauma, often interpersonal in nature, such as ongoing childhood abuse, domestic violence, or captivity.

2. Scope of Symptoms:

- **PTSD:** Primarily characterised by symptoms related to the traumatic event, such as flashbacks, nightmares, and hypervigilance.
- **C-PTSD:** In addition to PTSD symptoms, individuals with C-PTSD may experience more pervasive and enduring emotional, relational, and self-identity difficulties.

3. Symptom Clusters:

- **PTSD:** Symptoms are commonly categorised into re-experiencing, avoidance, hyperarousal, and negative changes in mood and thinking.
- **C-PTSD:** Symptoms may include those found in PTSD, along with difficulties in emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, self-perception, and a sense of meaninglessness.

4. Emotional Dysregulation:

- **PTSD:** While emotional dysregulation can occur, it is often more pronounced in C-PTSD.
- **C-PTSD:** Individuals may struggle with intense and unpredictable emotions, difficulty trusting others, and challenges in forming and maintaining relationships.

5. Duration and Onset:

- **PTSD:** Symptoms typically develop shortly after the traumatic event, but they may also emerge months or even years later.
- **C-PTSD:** Due to the prolonged nature of the trauma, symptoms often develop over an extended period, and the diagnosis may be considered when symptoms persist for months to years.

6. Treatment Considerations:

- **PTSD:** Treatment often involves evidence-based therapies such as EMDR or Cognitive Processing Therapy and medications.
- **C-PTSD:** Treatment may also focus on addressing broader issues, such as interpersonal difficulties and self-esteem, through therapies that address complex trauma and its impact on identity and relationships.

This fact sheet is provided for informational purposes only.

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