

📖 Topic Page: [Hysteria](#)

Definition: **hysteria** from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

According to the work of Sigmund Freud, the conversion of a psychological conflict or anxiety feeling into a physical symptom, such as paralysis, blindness, recurrent cough, vomiting, and general malaise. The term is little used today in diagnosis, psychosomatic illness being the modern term.



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[Encyclopedia of Anthropology](#)

Summary Article: **hysteria**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(hĭstĕr'ēə), in psychology, a disorder commonly known today as conversion disorder, in which a psychological conflict is converted into a bodily disturbance. It is distinguished from hypochondria by the fact that its sufferers do not generally confuse their condition with real, physical disease. Conversion disorder is usually found in patients with immature, histrionic personalities who are under great stress. Women are affected twice as frequently as men.

Symptoms, which are largely symbolic and which relieve the patient's anxiety, include limb paralysis, blindness, or convulsive seizures. The specific physical disorder usually does not correspond to the anatomy; e.g., an entire limb may be paralyzed rather than a specific group of muscles. The person may also appear to be unconcerned about the illness, a condition French psychiatrist Pierre Janet called *la belle indifference* (1929). At the end of the 19th cent., great advances were made in the understanding and cure of hysteria by the recognition of its psychogenic nature and by the use of hypnotism to influence the hysterical patient, who is known to have a high degree of suggestibility. The Austrian physician Josef Breuer, the French psychologists J. M. Charcot and Pierre Janet, and Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud were pioneers in the investigation of hysteria through hypnosis. Freud concluded that hysterical symptoms were symbolic representations of a repressed unconscious event, accompanied by strong emotions that could not be adequately expressed or discharged at the time. Instead, the strong effect associated with the event was diverted into the wrong somatic channels (conversion), and the physical symptom resulted. Psychoanalysis has had reasonable success in helping patients suffering from conversion disorder.

See Roy, A. , ed., *Hysteria* (1982);

Showalter, E. , *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (1997).

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hysteria. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/hysteria>



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