

Lunatic

A lunatic in an asylum, engraving of 1828.

Lunatic is an old term that was used to refer to a person with a [mental illness](#), or a [mental disability](#). The term goes back to the Latin word *lunaticus*, which means 'of the [moon](#)', or moonstruck. It was also used in English law until about 1930, when it was replaced by "person of unsound mind". Starting 1959, English law speaks about "mental illness".

History

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The [horoscope](#) of a "Lunatic" according to an astrologer who describes how the positions of the planets Saturn and Mars with respect to the moon are the cause of "diseases of the mind".^[1]

The term "lunatic" was originally used to refer mainly to [epilepsy](#) and [madness](#), as diseases thought to be caused by the moon.^{[2][3][4]} The [King James Version](#) of the Bible records "lunatick" in the [Gospel of Matthew](#) which has been interpreted as a reference to [epilepsy](#).^[2] By the fourth and fifth centuries, astrologers were commonly using the term to refer to neurological and psychiatric diseases.^{[2][5]} Philosophers such as [Aristotle](#) and [Pliny the Elder](#) argued that the full moon induced insane individuals with [bipolar disorder](#) by providing light during nights which would otherwise have been dark, and affecting susceptible individuals through the well-known route of [sleep deprivation](#).^[6] Until at least 1700, it was also a common belief that the moon influenced [fevers](#), [rheumatism](#), episodes of epilepsy and other [diseases](#).^[7]

Related pages

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- [Madness](#)

References

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