

# Character Builder 您好嗎？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest)

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about salads

清

Putonghua pronunciation: *qing1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ching1*

Meanings: clean, clear, pure

清 (radical 冫 = 水 *shui3*, water) implies water's cleansing/purifying effect: 清潔 (*qing1 jie2* = pure~clean = clean), 清洗 (*qing1 xi3* = clean~wash = wash/cleanse), 清理 (*qing1 li3* = clean~handle = tidy up). 眉清目秀 (*mei2 qing1 mu4 xiu4* = eyebrows~clean~eyes~graceful) describes neatly-silhouetted eyes and eyebrows enlivening a person's face.

Healthy diet includes 清水 (*qing1 shui3* = clear/pure/plain-water), 清湯 (*qing1 tang1* = clear~soup = consommé), 清蒸 (*qing1 jing2* = clear~steam = un-marinated steamed) fish, 清淡 (*qing1 dan4* = clean~light = non-oily light/bland-tasting) dishes. Eating salads/roughage can 清腸胃 (*qing1 chang2 wei4* = clean~intestines~stomach = is bowels-cleansing).

清新空氣 (*qing1 xin1 kong1 qi4* = clean~new~void~gas = clean/fresh air) makes us 清醒 (*qing1 xing3* = clearly~awake = clear-headed).

by Diana Yue