

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:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

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

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

4th 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 cancers

塊

Putonghua pronunciation: *kuai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *faai3*

Meanings: piece, patch, lump, chunk, mass

塊 (radical 土 *tu3*, earth/soil) means lump/piece: 木塊 (*mu4 kuai4* = wood~piece = pieces of wood), 冰塊 (*bing1 kuai4* = ice~piece = ice-cube/iceberg), 一小塊布 (*yi1 xiao3 kuai4 bu4* = a~small~piece-of~cloth), 一大塊地 (*yi1 da4 kuai4 di4* = a~big~piece/patch-of~land).

Pastry-chef forms dough into 薄塊 (*bao2 kuai4* = thin~slices/pieces/layers). 大塊頭 (*da4 kuai4 tou2* = big~piece~head = big/heavy/burly guy) likes steak in 厚塊 (*hou4 kuai4* = thick~slices/chunks). Shards are 碎塊 (*sui4 kuai4* = broken~pieces) of pottery.

Woman menstruating bleeds 血塊 (*xue3 kuai4* = blood~lump = thick/coagulated blood). Body scan reveals 塊狀物 (*kuai4 zhuang4 wu4* = lump~shaped~object = lump/lumps) in uterus. Operation costs total 十萬塊錢 (*shi2 wan4 kuai4 qian2* = ten~ten-thousand~pieces-of~money = 100,000 dollars).

by Diana Yue