

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



Putonghua pronunciation: *ai2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ngaam4*

Meanings: cancer

Ideogram 癌 ((radical 疒 *chuang2*, illness + 巖 = 岩 *yan2*, cliff, indicating an illness with a lump/patch/growth) was originally pronounced *yan2* (following pronunciation of 巖 *yan2*). To avoid confusion with homophone 炎 (*yan2*, infection), e.g. 肺炎 (*fei4 yan2* = lungs-infection = pneumonia), 肝炎 (*gan1 yan2* = liver-infection = hepatitis), 癌's pronunciation is changed to *ai2*, e.g. 肺癌 (*fei4 ai2* = lung-cancer), 肝癌 (*gan1 ai2* = liver-cancer).

癌細胞 (*ai2 xi4 bao1* = cancer~small~cells = cancer cells) spread, enter 淋巴系統 (*lin2 ba1 xi4 tong3* = "lymph"-transliterated-link-control = lymphatic system), 入侵 (*ri4 qin1* = enter~invade) other organs.

"Cancer" in Latin means 蟹 (*xie4*, crab). Cancers, like crabs, 橫行無忌 (*heng2 xing2 wu2 ji4* = crosswise-walk-no-constraint = are ruthless/lawless/uncontrollable).