

Character Builder 您好學？

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 senile dementia

痴

Putonghua pronunciation: *chi1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chi5*

Meaning: foolish, silly, stupid, deranged, idiot, crazy, craze, lunacy

痴 (radical 疒 = 病 *bing4*, illness) means 痴迷 (*chi1 mi2* = crazy-infatuated): 書痴 (*shu1 chi1* = book-crazy = bookworm), 酒痴 (*jiu3 chi1* = liquor/wine-crazy person), Romeo is 痴情 (*chi1 qing2* = crazily-in-love). However, 痴肥 (*chi1 fei2* = crazily-fat) means obese/obesity.

白痴 (*bai2 chi1* = white-crazy = idiots/fools) 痴人說夢 (*chi1 ren1 shuo1 meng4* = foolish-person-talk-dreams = talk fancy nonsense). In Chinese, dementia is 痴呆症 (*chi1 dai1 zheng4* = foolish-deranged-illness), 失智症 (*shi1 zhi4 zheng4* = lose-intelligence-illness).

老人痴呆症 (*lao3 ren2 chi1 dai1 zheng4* = old-people-foolish-deranged-illness = senile dementia) patients feel 憂鬱 (*you1 yu4* = worried-melancholic/depressed), 失憶 (*shi1 yi1* = lose-their-memory = forgetful), get 妄想 (*wang4 xiang3* = fantastic/unrealistic-thoughts = delusions).

by Diana Yue