

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 diet abstinence

Putonghua pronunciation: *cai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *choi3*

Meanings: leafy vegetables, dish of food, style of cooking

菜 means 青菜 (*qing1 cai4* = green/leafy-vegetables), 餸菜 (*song4 cai4* = accompany-rice-dish = cooked dishes). 地方菜 (*di4 fang1 cai4* = land-direction/quarter-cooking) = regional cuisine: 粵菜 (*Yue4 cai4* = Guangdong/Cantonese~cuisine), 京菜 (*jing1 cai4* = capital-cuisine = Beijing-style cuisine). 法國菜 (*fa3 guo2 cai4* = “F”-rance-transliterated~country~cuisine) = French cuisine.

Customer 點菜 (*dian3 cai4* = point~dish) = selects/orders dishes: 前菜 (*qian2 cai4* = before-dish = appetizers), 小菜 (*xiao3 cai4* = small/inexpensive~dishes), 主菜 (*zhu3 cai4* = master~dish = main dish). Waiter 上菜 (*shang4 cai4* = up/mount~dish = brings/serves dishes).

Balanced diet 有菜有肉 (*you3 cai4 you3 rou4* = has~vegetable~has~meat = contains/features vegis and meat). Beggar 面有菜色 (*mian4 you3 cai4 se1* = face~has~vegi/green~colour = has pale/bloodless complexion).