

Character Builder 您好學嗎?

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 Alzheimer's disease

Putonghua pronunciation: *nao3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *no5*

Meaning: brain, mind

腦 (radical 月 = 肉 *rou4*, flesh/meat) = brain. Memories stick in 腦海 (*nao3 hai3* = brain's-sea = the mind). 左腦 (*zuo3 nao3* = left-brain), 右腦 (*you4 nao3* = right-brain) serve different functions. 電腦學 (*dian4 nao3 xue2* = electric-brain-study) = computer studies.

Teacher tells student: 用腦! (*yong4 nao3* = use-brain = think!)
Writer 絞腦汁 (*jiao3 nao3 zhi1* = wring-brain's-juice = rack brains), 動腦筋 (*dong4 nao3 jin2* = move/exercise-brain-tendons = think, look for ideas).

Patients of 阿茲海默氏病 (*a4 zi1 hai3 mo4 shi4 bing4* = "Alzheimer's"-s-transliterated-disease = Alzheimer's disease) suffer from 腦退化 (*nao3 tui4 hua4* = brain-retreat-transform = brain's deterioration), often 抓腦袋 (*zhua1 nao3 dai4* = scratch-brain-sack = scratches head) forgetfully.

by Diana Yue