

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 cold snacks

拉

Putonghua pronunciation: *la1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *laai1*

Meanings: pull, drag, tug, tow, haul, lug, draft

拉 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) means pull/drag/tug. 拉開 (*la1 kai1* = pull-open), 拉闊 (*la1 kuo4* = pull-widen). 拉鍊 (*la1 lian4* = pull-chain = zipper) 拉上 (*la1 shang4* = zips-up). 拉扯 (*la1 che3* = pull-tug) = arguing non-stop. 拉關係 (*la1 guan1 xi4* = pull-related-string) = claim ties with influential people.

拉麵 (*la1 mian4* = pull-noodles) = hand-stretched noodles, Japanese “ramen”. 拉伕 (*la1 fu1* = pull/draft-men) for work/army. Volga boatmen 拉纜 (*la1 qian1* = pull/tow-rope = tow boat up rapids).

Slangy term 拉 means bowels-discharge: 拉屎拉尿 (*la1 shi3 la1 niao4* = discharge~faeces-discharge~urine = shit, wee). Cold/unclean food causes 腹瀉 (*fu1 she4* = belly-flush) = 拉肚子 (*la1 du4 zi0* = pull-stomach-diminutive) = diarrhea/runny stomach.