

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 drinking

湯

Putonghua pronunciation: *tang1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tong1*

Meanings: hot water, hot liquid, soup, broth

湯 has radical 氵 (= 水 *shui3*, water). 湯池 (*tang1 chi2* = hot-water~pool) = public hot baths. 赴湯蹈火 (*fu4 tang1 dao3 huo3* = go-to~geyser~step-through~fire) = pursue mission, braving dangers.

Stews have rich 湯汁 (*tang1 zhi1* = soup~juice = sauce/liquid). 湯菜 (*tang1 cai4* = soup~dishes), 湯麵 (*tang1 mian4* = soup~noodles) need good 湯底 (*tang1 di3* = soup~base), e.g. 雞湯 (*ji1 tang1* = chicken~soup). Chinese doctors concoct 湯藥 (*tang1 yao4* = liquid~medicine). New cabinet 換湯不換藥 (*huan4 tang1 bu4 huan4 yao4* = change~liquid~no~change~medicine = won't reform, only makes superficial/cosmetic changes).

Cantonese housewives often 煲老火湯 (*bao1 lao3 huo3 tang1* = slow-boil~old~fire~soup = concoct nourishing broths).

Colloquialism 飲湯 (*yin3 tang1* = drink~soup) means enjoying family dinner/comfort.