

# 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:

- 1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged
- 2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high
- 3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high
- 4<sup>th</sup> 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 babies

Putonghua pronunciation: *ru3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yue5*

Meanings: milk, breast, breast-feed

乳 = breast/milk: 牛乳 (*niu2 ru3* = cow~milk), 乳酪 (*ru3 lao4* = milk~coagulation/paste = cheese), 乳癌 (*ru3 ai2*) = breast-cancer). 乳房 (*ru3 fang2* = milk-room = breast) = vulgar term 奶子 (*nai3 zi0* = milk~diminutive = tits).

Woman's 雙乳 (*shuang1 ru3* = two~breasts) have 乳腺 (*ru3 xian4* = milk/mammary~glands), 乳頭 (*ru3 tou2* = breast-head = nipples), yield 乳汁 (*ru3 zhi1* = milk~juice/liquid). 人乳 (*ren2 ru3* = human~milk) is nutritious. Moms 哺乳 (*bu4 ru3* = feed~milk = breast-feed) or hire 乳母 (*ru3 mu3* = milk~mother = nannies). 乳齒 (*ru3 ci3* = milk~tooth/teeth) = baby's milk-tooth/teeth.

乳牛 (*ru3 niu2* = milk~cow) means dairy cattle, but 乳豬 (*ru3 zhu1* = milk~pig) means suckling pig.