

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 breathing

氣

Putonghua pronunciation: *qi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hei3*

Meanings: air, gas, energy, qi

氣 = air/gas: 空氣 (*kong1 qi4* = air), 氧氣 (*yang3 qi4* = nourishing ~gas = oxygen). 氣息 (*qi4 xi1* = air~exhaled-air) = breath. However, 生氣 (*sheng1 qi4* = grow~air/gas) means getting angry.

In Chinese medicine, 氣 (English Qi) means flow of energy/matter/message: 元氣 (*yuan2 qi4* = primary~energy), 濕氣 (*shi1 qi4* = wet~qi = un-dispensed/indisposed moisture symptom), 熱氣 (*ri4 qi4* = hot~qi = un-dispensed/indisposed heat symptom). Healthy people 神完氣足 (*shen2 wan2 qi4 zu2* = spirit~complete-breath/energy~full = are robust/energetic).

Chinese 氣功 (*qi4 gong1* = breath~control-kungfu = English Qigong) practitioners 運氣 (*yun4 qi4* = move/summon/muster energy), 養氣 (*yang3 qi4* = nourish/cultivate~energy). Singers use 丹田之氣 (*dan1 tian2 zhi1 qi4* = public-region~'s~breath = deep breath from below diaphragm).