

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 drugs and medicines

針

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhen1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jam1*

Meanings: needle, stitch, shot, pin, prick

針 (radical 金 *jin1*, gold/metal) means needle/pin/prick: 針眼 (*zhen1 yan3* = needle's-eye), 針線 (*zhen1 xian4* = needle-and-thread), clock's 時針 (*shi2 zhen1* = hour-hand), 指南針 (*zhi3 nan2 zhen1* = point-south-needle = compass).

Middleman 穿針引線 (*chuan1 zhen1 yin3 xian4* = thread-needle-pull-thread = arranges liaisons). Orator 針對 (*zhen1 dui4* = sharply-opposes/challenges) problem, makes 一針見血 (*yi1 zhen1 jian4 xue3* = one-needle-see-blood = sharp/pertinent) comment. 綿裡藏針 (*mian2 li3 cang2 zhen1* = cotton-wool-inside-hide-needle) describes soft-looking person hiding sharp/critical attitude.

Nurse 打針 (*da3 zhen1* = shoot-needle = give medical shots). Wound gets 縫針 (*feng2 zhen1* = sew-stitches = stitched up), heals with 針刺 (*zhen1 ci4* = sharp-prickly) pain. 針灸 (*zhen1 jiu4* = needle-roast) = acupuncture and moxibustion.