

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 Chinese tonic medicines

虛

Putonghua pronunciation: *xū1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hu1*

Meaning: void, empty, abstract, weak, frail, exhausted, vanity

虛 (radical 声 *hu1*, tiger's stripe) means 虛空 (*xū1 kong1* = void-empty), 虛假 (*xū1 jiǎ3* = untrue-false), 虛偽 (*xū1 wēi3* = insincere-hypocritical), 虛心 (*xū1 xīn1* = empty-heart) means modest/humble, but 虛榮心 (*xū1 róng2 xīn1* = vain-glorious-heart) means vanity. 虛無 (*xū1 wú2* = void-nothing) = nihilistic/nihilism.

Invalid 氣血兩虛 (*qì4 xūe3 liǎng3 xū1* = energy-blood-both-weak/deficient), feels 虛弱 (*xū1 ruo4* = weak-strengthless), 虛脫 (*xū1 tuō1* = weak-exhausted), has 虛汗 (*xū1 hàn4* = weak-sweat = abnormal sweating due to debility), suspects cancer, but is 虛驚 (*xū1 jīng1* = false-alarm)!

Chinese physician defines 虛症 (*xū1 zhēng4* = weakness/deficiency-illnesses)' symptoms: 陰虛發熱 (*yīn1 xū1 fā1 rē4* = yin-principle-weak-generates-fever), 陽虛怕冷 (*yáng2 xū1 pà4 lēng3* = yang-principle-weak-fears-cold).

by Diana Yue