

# 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 the digestive system

腸

Putonghua pronunciation: *chang2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *cheung4*

Meanings: intestine

腸 (radical 月 = 肉 *rou4*, meat/flesh) means intestines. 喉 (*hou2*, throat), 胃 (*wei4*, stomach), 小腸 (*xiao3 chang2* = small-intestine), 大腸 (*da4 chang3* = big-intestine = colon) constitute 食道 (*shi2 dao4* = eat/food-channel = alimentary canal).

小腸氣 (*xiao3 chang3 qi4* = small-intestine-gas = hernia), 腸胃炎 (*chang3 wei4 yan2* = intestines~stomach~fever = enterogastritis), 盲腸炎 (*mang2 chang3 yan2* = blind-intestine~fever = appendix inflammation = appendicitis) are unwelcome ailments. 斷腸人 (*duan4 chang3 ren2* = intestines~broken/severed-person) means heart-broken person/lover.

香腸 (*xiang1 chang3* = flavorsome-sausage) is western sausage (Vienna sausage, frankfurter etc.) 臘腸 (*la4 chang3* = wind-dried/preserved-sausage) is Chinese sausage. Cantonese people who don't know English facetiously call the English writing-script 雞腸 (*ji1 chang3* = chicken's-intestines, i.e., strange/indecipherable coils).

by Diana Yue