

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

補

Putonghua pronunciation: *bu3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bo2*

Meaning: mend, patch, repair, replenish, re-fill, nourishing, invigorating

補 (radical 衤 = 衣 clothing) = mend/repair/replenish: 縫補 (*feng2 bu3 yi1* = sew-patch-up) clothing, 修補 (*xiu1 bu3* = repair-patch-up) road-surface/relations, 補充 (*bu3 cong1* = mend-fill = replenish) supplies. Next-to-best candidates are on 後補 (*hou4 bu3* = after-fill = reserve) list.

Sacked employee seeks 補償 (*bu3 chang2* = re-fill-repay = compensation). Pregnant women 補身 (*bu3 shen1* = replenish-body = take replenishments/nourishments to strengthen body).

Advice for invalid after severe hemorrhage: 虛則補之 (*xu1 ze2 bu3 zhi1* = weak/deficient-then-replenish-it = If body has general debilities, then give it replenishments/nourishments). 亡羊補牢, 未為晚也 (*wang2 yang2 bu3 lao2, wei4 wei4 wan3 ye3* = die/lose-sheep/goat-mend-pen, not-yet-is-evening/late-ah! = Your sheep has run away, but you should still repair your fence!

by Diana Yue