

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

Putonghua pronunciation: *cha2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *cha4*

Meanings: tea

茶 (radical 艹 = 草 *cao3*, grass) is 飲料 (*yin3 liao4* = drink~material = beverage): 茶樹 (*cha2 shu4* = tea~tree/shrub), 茶葉 (*cha2 ye4* = tea~leaves), 青茶 (*qing1 cha2* = green~tea), 紅茶 (*hong2 cha2* = red~tea).

English drink 奶茶 (*nai3 cha2* = milk~tea = tea with milk) for 下午茶 (*xia4 wu3 cha2* = after~noon~tea). 濃茶 (*nong2 cha2* = strong~tea) cleans palate. Sick/worried person 茶飯不思 (*cha2 fan4 bu4 si1* = tea~cooked~rice~no~think = has no appetite).

Chinese doctor prepares 苦茶 (*ku3 cha2* = bitter~tea = herbal medicine concoction) by slow-boiling 草藥 (*cao3 yao4* = herbal~medicine = medicinal herbs). Cantonese habitually drink 涼茶 (*liang2 cha2* = Cantonese *leung2 cha4* = cool~tea = herbal tea which cools/clears body system).