

Character Builder 您好學？

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

藥

Putonghua pronunciation: *yao4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yeuk6*

Meaning: medicine, medication, drug, tonic, booster, pharmaceuticals

藥 (radical 艹 = 草 *cao3*, grass/herb) = 藥物 (*yao4 wu4* = medicine-things = medicine/drug): 藥廠 (*yao4 chang3* = pharmaceutical-factory), 西藥 (*xi1 yao4* = western-medicines), 中藥 (*Zhong1 yao4* = Chinese-medicines). Roots of 人參 (*ren2 sen1* = ginseng), 當歸 (*dang1 gui1* = angelica sinensis) are 補藥 (*bu3 yao4* = replenishing/invigorating-medicine) ingredients.

Doctors write 藥方 (*yao4 fang1* = medical-prescriptions), 藥到病除 (*yao4 dao4 bing4 chu2* = medicine-arrives/applied-illness-quickly-relieved). But sage advises: 心病還須心藥醫 (*xin1 bing4 hai2 xu1 xin1 yao4 yi1* = heart's-illness-still-needs-heart's-medicine-to-cure = heart's woes/grudges need delicate psychological handling).

Wish your invaliding friend a speedy recovery by saying 早占勿藥 (*zao3 zhan1 wu4 yao4* = early-forecast-no-medicine), elegant phrase meaning "Get off medication soon!"

by Diana Yue