

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 fatty foods

滯

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jai6*

Meanings: blocked, obstructed, stagnant, sluggish, inert

滯 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) describes sluggish/stopped flow. 滯後 (*zhi4 hou4* = sluggish~behind) = lagging behind. Flight-delay makes passengers滯留 (*zhi4 liu2* = sluggish~stay = stay behind) at airport. Plan meets 阻滯 (*zu3 zhi4* = obstruct~ sluggish = obstruction), is stalled.

Idiot目光呆滯 (*mu4 guang1 dai1 zhi4* = eyes~brightness~dull~stagnant = has slow-witted/blank-looking eyes). Market 停滯不前 (*ting2 zhi4 bu4 qian2* = stop~lags~not~advance = shows no progress), bonds 滯銷 (*zhi4 xiao1* = sluggish~sell = don't sell well). 大便 (*da4 bian4* = big~convenience) = faeces. 吃滯 (*chi4 zhi4* = Cantonese 食滯 *sik6 jai6* = eat~sluggish = over-eating causing sluggish digestion) affects 排便 (*pai2 bian4* = discharge-of~faeces = bowels-discharge), causes 便秘 (*bian4 mi4* = convenience~secret = constipation).

by Diana Yue