

# 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 fatty foods

消

Putonghua pronunciation: *xiao1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *siu1*

Meanings: shrink, vanish, dispel, cancel, eliminate, nullify

消 (radical 冫 = 水 *shui3*, water) = shrinking/vanishing: 消瘦 (*xiao1 shou4* = shrink~thin = become thin/emaciated), 消失 (*xiao1 shi1* = vanish~gone), 消除 (*xiao1 chu2* = cancel~remove), 取消 (*qu3 xiao* = take~cancel = cancel), 消滅 (*xiao1 mie4* = eliminate~kill), 消極 (*xiao1 ji2* = shrink~pole/ultimate) = passive/negative.

消費 (*xiao1 fei4* = dispel~spend) = consume/consumption. Exercise 消耗 (*xiao1 hao4* = dispel~waste = consumes/reduces) calories. 消長 (*xiao1 zhang3* = shrink~or-grow) describes wax and wane of rivals' power/fortune.

Body 吃不消 (*chi4 bu4 xiao1* = eat-no/cannot~dispel = cannot stand) too much work/alcohol. 消化 (*xiao1 hua4* = dispel~transform/melt) = digest/digestion. 消化不良 (*xiao1 hua4 bu4 liang2* = digestion~no~good) = indigestion. Tea/vinegar can 消滯 (*xiao1 zhi4* = dispel~sluggish-digestion = ease indigestion).

by Diana Yue