

# 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.

## This week: Words about health and healing

藥

Pronunciation: *yao* (Putonghua, 4<sup>th</sup> tone), *yeuk* (Cantonese, 6<sup>th</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: medicine, drug

Chinese 藥 (*radical* 艹 *cao* = grass) is mostly 草藥 (*cao yao* = grass/herbal~medicine). Doctors write 藥方 (*yao fang* = medicine~prescriptions). 人參 (*ren shen* = ginseng), 冬蟲夏草 (*dong cong xia cao* = winter~worm~summer~grass = caterpillar-fungus = cordyceps *sinensis*), 牛黃 (*niu huang* = cow's~gall-stones) are special ingredients.

Unwell people 服藥 (*fu yao* = swallow/take~medicine): 胃藥 (*wei yao* = stomach-pain-relief~medicine), 瀉藥 (*xie yao* = diarrhoea~ medicine = laxatives), 抗生素 (*kang sheng su* = resist~bacteria-growth~essence = antibiotics). 春藥 (*chun yao* = spring~medicine = sexual stimulant) means aphrodisiac. 靈丹妙藥 (*ling dan miao yao* = miraculous~pill~wonderful~drug) means all-curing medicine or effective problem-solving plan. 無可救藥 (*wu ke jiu yao* = nothing~can~save~medicine) describes someone's incurable illness, behaviour, situation.

by Diana Yue