

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 obesity

肚

Putonghua pronunciation: *du4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *to5*

Meanings: stomach, belly, womb

肚, also 肚子 (*du4 zi0* = stomach~diminutive), 肚皮 (*du4 pi2* = stomach~skin), often means 胃 (*wei4*, stomach). Hungry person yells “肚子餓了!” (*du4 zi e4 le0* = stomach~feel-hungry = “I’m hungry!”) Famine victims 餓肚皮 (*e4 du4 pi2* = starve~stomach = go without food).

Obese people have 大肚子 (*da4 du4 zi0* = big/bulging belly). 大了肚子 (*da4 le0 du4 zi0* = get-big~ed-belly) describes woman who got pregnant. 挺胸凸肚 (*ting3 xiong1 tu1 du4* = prop-up~chest~protrude-belly) describes self-important person’s arrogant pose.

Drinkers get high after 三杯下肚 (*san1 bei1 xia4 du4* = three~cups~down~stomach = having downed a few drinks). Dirty food makes diners 拉肚子 (*la1 du4 zi0* = pull~stomach = have diarrhoea).