

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

Putonghua pronunciation: **zhong4**

Cantonese pronunciation: **chung5**

Meanings: heavy, heaviness, weight

In Chinese, two opposite adjectives forming a noun indicates a quality. Girls care about their bodies' 輕重 (**qing1 zhong4** = light~heavy = weight), 肥瘦 (**fei2 shou4** = fat~skinny = shape/plumpness/weight).

重量 (**zhong4 liang4** = heavy~measure/volume) = weight. Obese people are 過重 (**guo4 zhong4** = over-heavy = overweight). Their movements are 笨重 (**ben4 zhong4** = clumsy~heavy).

重 also means 重要 (**zhong4 yao4** = heavy~important = important). Orators show 凝重 (**ning2 zhong4** = concentrated~heavy = serious) expressions, emphasize 重點 (**zhong4 dian3** = important~point = focuses), 重視 (**zhong4 shi4** = important~see = attach importance to) rhetoric. Reporters cover 重大事件 (**zhong4 da4 shi4 jian4** = important~big~event~ item = important/significant events), 重要人物 (**zhong4 yao4 ren2 wu4** = heavy~necessary~person~object = VIPs).

by Diana Yue