

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 pregnancy

胎

Putonghua pronunciation: *tai 1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *toi 1*

Meanings: womb, foetus

胎生 (*tai1 sheng1* = womb-born) = vivipara/viviparous. 接生婦 (*jie2 sheng1 fu4* = receive-birth-woman = midwife) delivers 胎兒 (*tai1 er2* = womb-child = baby), removes 胎衣 (*tai1 yi1* = foetal-coat/membranes = afterbirth), 胎盤 (*tai1 pan2* = foetal-disc = placenta). 脫胎換骨 (*tuō1 tai1 huan4 gu3* = leave-womb-change-bones) means thoroughly reformed/revitalized person's metamorphosis.

頭胎 (*tou2 tai1* = head/first-born) = firstborn/eldest child. 雙胞胎 (*shuang1 bao1 tai1* = pair~uterus/womb-foetus) = twins. 各懷鬼胎 (*ge4 huai2 gui3 tai1* = each~contain-ghost-foetus) describes antagonists secretly planning different conspiracies.

Pro-life/pro-choice debate discusses 墮胎 (*duo4 tai1* = fall-foetus = 打胎, *da3 tai1* = hit~foetus = abortion). 胎死腹中 (*tai1 si3 fu4 zhong1* = foetus-dies~womb~inside) describes stillborn baby or aborted plans.

by Diana Yue