

# 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 the face

Putonghua pronunciation: *bi2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bei6*

Meanings: nose

We use 鼻 (= 鼻子 *bi2 zi0* = nose~diminutive = nose) to 呼吸 (*hu1 xi1* = exhale~inhale = breathe), 嗅 (*xiu4* = smell). 打鼻鼾 (*da3 bi2 han1* = hit~nose~snore) = snoring, 挖鼻孔 (*wa1 bi2 kong3* = dig~nose~hole) = picking nose/nostril.

Catching 傷風 (*shang1 feng1* = hurt~wind = cold) causes 鼻塞 (*bi2 sai1* = nose/nasal~congestion), 流鼻涕 (*liu2 bi2 ti4* = flow~nose~fluid = runny nose). 酒糟鼻 (*jiu3 zao1 bi2* = wine/liquor~dregs~nose) means red lobulated nose.

Snobs 鼻孔朝天 (*bi2 kiong3 chao2 tian1* = nose~holes~towards~sky = turn nose up at others). Weak dependents 仰人鼻息 (*yang3 ren2 bi2 xi1* = look-up-to~someone's~nose~breath). 塌鼻 (*ta1 bi2* = collapse/flat~nosed) Asians envy 高鼻 (*gao1 bi2* = tall-nosed) Caucasians.