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 salads

**清**

Putonghua pronunciation: *qing1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ching1*

Meanings: clean, clear, pure

清 (radical 氵 = 水 shui3, water) implies water’s cleansing/purifying effect: 清潔 (qing1 jie2 = pure-clean = clean), 清洗 (qing1 xi3 = clean-wash = wash/cleanse), 清理 (qing1 li3 = clean-handle = tidy up). 眉清目秀 (mei2 qing1 mu4 xiu4 = eyebrows-clean-eyes-graceful) describes neatly-silhouetted eyes and eyebrows enlivening a person’s face.

Healthy diet includes清水 (qing1 shui3 = clear/pure/plain-water), 清湯 (qing1 tang1 = clear-soup = consommé), 清蒸 (qing1 jing2 = clear-steam = un-marinated steamed) fish, 清淡 (qing1 dan4 = clean-light = non-oily light/bland-tasting) dishes. Eating salads/roughage can 清腸胃 (qing1 chang2 wei4 = clean-intestines-stomach = is bowels-cleansing).

清新空氣 (qing1 xin1 kong1 qi4 = clean-new-void-gas = clean/fresh air) makes us 清醒 (qing1 xing3 = clearly-awake = clear-headed).

by Diana Yue