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.

This week: Words about dieting

減 = lessen. Kids learn 加 (jia = addition), 减 (jian = subtraction), 乘 (cheng = multiplication), 除 (chu = division).

After 减薪 (jian xin = reduce-pay = pay cut), our purchasing power 减弱 (jian ruo = diminish-weak = is weakened). We 减少 (jian shao = reduce-less = reduce) expenses, resist shops’大减价 (da jian jia = big-reduce-price = big sales), petition government to 减税 (jian shui = cut-taxes) to 减轻 (jian qing = lessen-lighten) our burden.

To avoid 過胖 (guo pang = gone-over-fat = overweight), people 减肥 (jian fei = reduce-fat = reduce weight), 節食 (jie shi = control/reduce-eating = eat less, go on diets). “You look 清减!” (qing jian = cleansed-reduced) means “You look thinner/slimmer!”

Pronunciation: jian (Putonghua, 3rd tone), gaam (Cantonese, 2nd tone)
Basic meaning: subtract, reduce

by Diana Yue