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

戒 = abstain from. Diabetic patients 戒糖 (jie tang = abstain-from-sugar), 戒煙 (jie yan = quit-cigarettes), bear 戒心 (jie xin = alert-heart = wariness) towards over-eating. Monks observe 戒律 (jie lu = abstinence-rules), e.g. 齋戒 (zhai jie = fasting/vegetarian-abstinence), dare not 破戒 (po jie = break-abstinence-rules).

Moralists preach 戒驕 (jie jiao = restraint-from-arrogance), 戒貪 (jie tan = restraint-from-greed/corruption). Addicts try to 戒酒 (jie jiu = cut/quit-alcoholic-drinks), 戒賭 (jie du 3rd tone = quit-gambling), 戒毒 (jie du 2nd tone = quit-poisonous-drugs).

During 戒嚴 (jie yan = forbid-strict = curfew), police 戒備 (jie bei = alert-ready = remain on-guard). Heroes hunting down villains 大開殺戒 (da kai sha jie = big-break-killing-rule = kill with no restraint).

by Diana Yue