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 wound treatment

治
Putonghua pronunciation: zhi4
Cantonese pronunciation: ji6
Meanings: heal

治 = tackle/control/eliminate/manage: 治水 (zhi4 shui3 = control-water = implement flood-control measures), 治家 (zhi4 jia1 = manage-family-budget/affairs), 治国 (zhi4 guo2 = control/rule-country). 醫治 (yi1 zhi4 = medicine-cure) = apply medical treatment.

Doctors 治病 (zhi4 bing4 = treat/cure-illnesses). 藥物 (yao4 wu4 = medicine-things = drugs) 治癒 (zhi4 yu4 = heal-cure = completely cure) chronic illnesses. Surgery 根治 (gen1 zhi4 = root-cure = thoroughly cure) ulcers.


by Diana Yue