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:

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 Chinese tonic medicines

補 [Putonghua pronunciation: bu3]
Cantonese pronunciation: bo2
Meaning: mend, patch, repair, replenish, re-fill, nourishing, invigorating

補 (radical 衣 = clothing) = mend/repair/replenish: 服補 (feng2 bu3 yi1 = sew-patch-up) clothing, 修補 (xiu1 bu3 = repair-patch-up) road/surface/relation, 補充 (bu3 cong1 = mend-fill = replenish) supplies. Next-to-best candidates are on 後補 (hou4 bu3 = after-fill = reserve) list.

Sacked employee seeks 補償 (bu3 chang2 = re-fill-repay = compensation). Pregnant women 補身 (bu3 shen1 = replenish-body = take replenishments/nourishments to strengthen body).

Advice for invalid after severe hemorrhage: 虛則補之 (xū1 ze2 bu3 zhi1 = weak/deficient-then-replenish-it = If body has general deilities, then give it replenishments/nourishments).

亡羊補牢, 未為晚也 (wang2 yang2 bu3 lao2, wei4 wei4 wan3 ye3 = die/lose-sheep/goat-mend-pen, not-yet-is-evening/late-ah! = Your sheep has run away, but you should still repair your fence!)

by Diana Yue