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 fatty foods

脂 (radical 月 = 肉 rou4, meat) = fat from animals/seeds: 松脂 (song1 zhi1 = pine-fat/resin), 脂肪 (zhi1 fang2 = fat-waist/belly-fat = animal fat). 油脂 (you2 zhi1 = oil-fat) = grease/olein. 潤滑脂 (run4 hua4 zhi1 = nourish-smooth-fat) = lubricant.

Tyrant exploits 民脂民膏 (min2 zhi1 min2 gao1 = people’s-fat-people’s-lard = public wealth/savings). 好脂 (yan1 zhi0 = red-fat) means rouge. 塗脂抹粉 (tu2 zhi1 mo4 fen3 = paint-rouge-smudge-rouge) means applying cosmetics or glossing over political image/policy.

Eating 豬油 (zhu1 you2 = pig’s-melted-fat = lard), 雞油 (ji2 you2 = chicken-fat/oil) increases body’s content of 飽和脂肪酸 (bao3 he2 zhi1 fang2 suan1 = satiate-mix-fat-fat-acid = saturated fatty acids). Exercise helps 燒脂 (shao1 zhi1 = burn-away-fat).

by Diana Yue