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 health and healing

病
(radical 广 bing = illness)
Pronunciation: beng (Putonghua, 6th tone), beng (Cantonese, 6th tone)
Basic meaning: illness, disease

病了 (bing le = ill-already) = 生病 (sheng bing = grow-ill) = fall ill. We console friends down with 感冒 (gan mao = influenza): “小病是福! (xiao bing shi fu = slight-illness-is-blessing — lets you rest). Soon you'll 病好 (bing hao = ill-well = recover).”

感染病 (chuan ran bing = pass-catch-illnesses) = infectious diseases: 鼠疫 (shu yi = rats-epidemic = Black Death), 爱滋病 (ai zi bing = AIDS-transliterated-disease). 病人 (bing ren = ill-person = patients) carrying 病毒 (bing du = disease-poison = viruses) may 病死 (bing si = ill-die).

Pathological gamblers are 病态赌徒 (bing tai du tu = sick-condition-gamble-person). Misunderstandings make people develop 心病 (xin bing = heart-disease = grudges).

by Diana Yue