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 \ 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

Putonghua pronunciation: ti2
Cantonese pronunciation: tai4
Meaning: raise, lift, pick up, carry, hold in suspension, extract

提 (radical 手 = hand) means take/lift/extract: 提燈 (ti2 deng1 = hold-lamp), 提筆 (ti2 bi3 = take-up-pen = write), 手提 (shou3 ti2 = hand-carry) luggage, 提款機 (ti2 kuan3 jil = take-out-money-machine = ATM).

CEO 提出 (ti2 chu1 = raise-bring-up = mentions/suggests): 提前 (ti2 qian2 = move-earlier) pay-rise, 提高 (ti2 gao1 = raise-higher) staff morale.

Chinese physician 提醒 (ti2 xing3 = raise-awaken = reminds) invalid: 提取精華 (ti2 chu3 jing1 hua2 = take-extract-best-essence) from chicken, add 人參 (ren2 sen1 = ginseng), prepare 藥膳 (yao4 shan4 = medicine-meal = dishes having medicinal ingredients). Effect is 提氣 (ti2 qi4 = enhance-breathing/energy), 提神醒腦 (ti2 shen2 xing3 nao3 = raise-senses-awaken-brain = boost working of brain).

by Diana Yue