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 fever

Putonghua pronunciation: yün1, yün4
Cantonese pronunciation: wan4
Meaning: dizzy, giddy, dizziness, vertigo, faint, swoon

晕 (radical 日 ri4, sun) means 晕眩 (yün4 xuan4 = dizzy-eyes-dizzy/dazzled = dizziness). 晕车 (yün4 che1 = dizzy-car) = feel dizzy on car-ride. 晕船 (yün4 chuan2 = dizzy-boat) = feel dizzy on boat-ride.

畏高症 (wei4 gao1 zheng4 = fear-heights-disease = acrophobia) patient 晕高 (yün4 gao1 = dizzy-height = feels dizzy on heights).
Insulted senior 氣極暈倒 (qi4 ji2 yün1 dao3 = angry-most-faint-fall = is so angry he fainted), 晕死 (yün1 xi3 = faint-die = passes out).

頭暈 (tou2 yün1 = head-dizzy) = feel dizzy. Feverish patient 晕暈沉沉 (yün4 yün4 chen2 chen2 = dizzy-dizzy-heavy-heavy = feels dizzy and dense). 頭暈腦脹 (tou2 yün1 nao3 zhang4 = head-dizzy-brain-swollen) means feeling headache/fever or feeling confused/foggy about orientation/situation.

by Diana Yue