

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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

肥

Putonghua pronunciation: *fei2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fei4*

Meanings: fat, fatty, large, loose, rich, fertile

Ideogram 肥 (月 = 肉 *rou4*, flesh/meat + 巴 *ba1*, loose) indicates fatty/loose flesh: 肥胖 (*fei2 pang4* = fat~plump), 減肥 (*jian3 fei2* = reduce~fat/weight). 肥美 (*fei2 mei3* = fat/rich/fertile~ beautiful) soil yields 肥壯 (*fei2 zhuang4* = fat~strong) crops. Pigs/crustaceans yield 肥肉 (*fei2 rou4* = fatty~flesh/meat), 肥膏 (*fei2 gao1* = rich~fat/roe).

腦滿腸肥 (*nao3 man3 chang2 fei2* = brain~full-intestines~fat) describes swollen/unsightly look of gourmands/money-chasers. 肥羊 (*fei2 yang2* = fat~lamb) also means easy prey. Idiom 人怕出名豬怕肥 (*ren2 pa4 chu1 ming2 zhu1 pa4 fei2* = person~fear~burst~name~pig~fear~fat) means “Getting fame/publicity inconveniences people; being fat is bad for pigs”.

Poet describes late-spring garden-scene as 綠肥紅瘦 (*lü4 fei2 hong2 shou4* = green~fat~red~thin = “leaves flourishing, flowers emaciated”).

by Diana Yue