

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:

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 obesity

減

Putonghua pronunciation: *jian3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gaam2*

Meanings: lessen, reduce

減 = reduce. Recession-hit businesses 減薪 (*jian3 xin1* = reduce-salaries), 減少開支 (*jian2 shao3 kai1 zhi1* = reduce-less-open-draw = cut expenses). Consequently, people's purchasing power 減弱 (*jian3 ruo4* = reduce-weak = weakens).

Environmentalists advocate 減排 (*jian3 pai2*, short for 減少排放廢氣 = *jian2 shao3 pai2 fang4 fei4 qi4* = reduce-less-release-free-trash-gases = reducing waste gas emission).

Obese people 減肥 (*jian3 fei2* = reduce-fat = reduce weight), 節食 (*jie2 shi2* = reduce-eating = diet), 戒糖 (*jie4 tang2* = avoid sugar). They hate to hear “你發福了!” (*ni3 fa1 fu2 le0* = you-develop-fortune-ed = you look fatter/broader!), welcome compliment “你清減了!” (*ni3 qing1 jian3 le0* = you-cleansed-reduced-ed = “You look thinner/slimmer!”)