

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 the tastes

酸

Putonghua pronunciation: *suan 1*

Meanings: acid, sour taste, sour or bitter feeling

酸 = acids: 無機酸 (*wu ji suan 211* = none/in-organic~acid), 有機酸 (*you ji suan 311* = has/is-organic~acid), 胃酸 (*wei suan 41* = stomach/gastric~acid acid), 鹼水 (*qiang shui 13* = strong-acid~water/liquid = strong/corrosive acids). Foods are 酸性 (*suan xing 14* = of-acidic~nature) or 鹼性 (*jian xing 34* = of-alkaline~nature). 酸 describes 醋 (*cu 4* = vinegar), 檸檬 (*ning meng 22* = “lemon”-transliterated), 薑醋 (*jiang cu 14* = ginger~vinegar = pig’s knuckles, eggs, ginger stewed in black vinegar). 酸奶 (*suan nai 13* = sour~milk) = yogurt.

Strained muscles feel 酸軟 (*suan ruan 13* = sour~soft = aching/weak). Jealous people feel 酸溜溜 (*suan liu liu 111* = sour~slippery~slippery). 心酸 (*xin suan 11* = heart~sour) = heart-torn/heart-ache feeling.