

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 hams

Putonghua pronunciation: *tui3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tui2*

Meanings: leg

腿 comprises 大腿 (*da4 tui3* = big-leg = upper leg), 小腿 (*xiao3 tui3* = small-leg = lower leg), 肌肉 (*ji1 rou4* = muscle~flesh = muscles), 筋骨 (*jin1 gu3* = tendons-and~bones).

Four-legged animals have 前腿 (*qian2 tui3* = front~legs), 後腿 (*hou4 tui3* = hind-legs).

Butchers sell 雞腿 (*ji1 tui3* = chicken~leg = drumsticks), 羊腿 (*yang2 tui3* = sheep/lamb~leg = leg of lamb). 豬腿肉 (*zhu1 tui3 rou4* = pig~leg~meat) = pork loin. 火腿 (*huo3 tui3* = fire~leg) = ham.

提腿伸腰 (*ti2 tui3 shen1 yao1* = lift~leg~stretch~waist), 掃堂腿 (*sao3 tang2 tui3* = sweep~hall~leg = swirl one leg horizontally above ground) are Chinese kung-fu actions. 飛毛腿 (*fei1 mao2 tui3* = fly~hair~legs) means extremely fast runner.