

Chinese Greetings | Saying Hello

Without “你好”

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1. When meeting someone for the first time

你好 / 您好

(nǐ hǎo/ nín hǎo)

Chinese people don't really say 你好 in real life. It can come off as overly formal, or even awkward. But you'll still hear it in professional contexts. It's most frequently used when meeting someone for the first time, such as being introduced to a new business contact. We often say 您好 when shaking hands.

嗨

(hāi)

嘿

(hēi)

哈喽

(Hā lóu)

Hi, Hey, Hello

Members of the younger generation often prefer to use more informal greetings than 你好. Keep in mind that these are very casual and should not be used in formal settings because they can be seen as nonchalant or disrespectful.

2. When meeting someone that you often see

◆ Time-Related Greetings:

- ◆ General time-related greetings:

早 / 早安 / 早上好

(zǎo/ zǎo ān/ zǎoshang hǎo)

Good morning

下午好

(xiàwǔ hǎo)

Good afternoon

晚上好

(wǎnshàng hǎo)
Good evening

晚安

(wǎn'ān)
Good night

These are very short and straightforward greetings. Just like in other languages, you can use them based on the time you see each other. The best way to respond to these is to just repeat the greeting back to them. Pay attention to 晚安, which is used just before bed.

◆ Around mealtime

你吃了吗?

(Nǐ chī le ma?)

吃饭了吗?

(Chīfàn le ma?)

It's not an invitation to lunch. This greeting is basically the same as "hello." It actually dates back to ancient times. Back then, whether or not someone had eaten was linked to their overall health and wellbeing. Let's look at an example dialogue:

A: 你吃了吗? *Have you eaten yet?*

(Nǐ chī le ma?)

B: 吃了, 你呢? *Yes. How about you?*

(Chī le, nǐ ne.)

A: 还没呢。 *Not yet.*

(Hái méi ne.)

◆ Place-Related Greetings:

你去哪儿?

(Nǐ qù nǎr?)
Where are you going?

This might seem a bit rude and nosy at first, but it's fairly common in China to ask someone where they are going if you see them leaving their house. Actually, most of the time, they don't really want to invade your privacy. It's just a simple way to show they care and say hello. In response, if it's not too personal, then you can tell them specifically where you're headed.

If you don't want to talk about it, you can just say:

我出去有点事。

(Wǒ chūqu yǒu diǎn shì.)

I'm going out to handle some personal business.

Alternatively, if you have an idea where they might be going, you can ask them more specifically:

出门啊?

(Chūmén a?)

Are you going out?

出去玩?

(Chūqù wán?)

Going out to play?

上班去啊?

(Shàngbān qù a?)

Going to work?

上学去啊?

(Shàngxué qù a?)

Going to school?

And if you see them coming home, you can say:

回来了啊!

(Huíláile a!)

You're back!

下班了?

(Xià bān le?)

Off work?

放学了?

(Fàngxué le?)
Off school?

3. When you haven't seen each other for a while

好久不见

(hǎo jiǔ bú jiàn)
Long time no see!

This greeting is used when you haven't seen a friend or acquaintance for a while. Keep in mind that the length of time is relative. You can say it if it's been a few years or only a few weeks.

最近好吗?

(zuì jìn hǎo ma?)
How have you been?

This is a great follow-up to 好久不见, although it can also be used as a standalone greeting when accompanied by their name.

Here are some similar expressions:

你怎么样?

(Nǐ zěnmeyàng?)
How are you doing?

你还好吗?

(Nǐ hái hǎo ma?)
How are you?

And here are a few appropriate ways to respond:

还行

(hái xíng)
Not bad!

还好

(hǎo)
Good.

凑活

(còu huó)
So-so.

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