From Nihonshock: http://nihonshock.com/2009/11/stop-saying-totemo/

Vocab power: stop saying “totemo”

Totemo means “*very*” in Japanese, also sometimes pronounced とっても/*tottemo* with a kicked “t” for added emphasis. Because it is so easy to pronounce, so broad in meaning and so simple in grammar, it is one of the most useful words in the Japanese language. “Power-words” like*totemo* great for speed-learning, and non-Japanese pick up on these words with unparalleled ease… However, all too often those learners end up clinging to these words to a far greater degree than they should and for a much longer time than they should.

While heavy reliance on a select few *power-words* may be sufficient for travelers, for anyone who wants to understand everyday Japanese as it is spoken by native speakers, or perhaps someday even sound intelligent speaking Japanese, these words can be almost like an invisible barrier to more advanced vocabulary. Of these words, *totemo* is easily one of the most overused. So to help Japanese learners cure their addiction to this intoxicatingly easy word, I’ve collected 7 alternatives to help you **lay off the *totemo* juice and expand your linguistic horizons**.

1. Say かなり (kanari) instead

Kanari is a fabulous word, I can’t recommend it enough. It’s meaning and usage is exactly the same as *totemo* so you can start using it like a pro right away, there are no hidden nuance traps waiting to bite your leg off and your Japanese will instantly sound much more confident and natural. The only catch is you have to make the Japanese “**r**” sound to say it, which can be a little tricky for beginners.

And actually this word is a little **more** flexible than *totemo*. *Kanari* can also be used with nouns if you glue them together with the ‘*no*‘ particle, although you should note that using it that way comes off as *kanari* casual.

昨日の試験はとても難しかったです。
Kinou no shiken wa totemo muzukashikatta desu.
Yesterday’s test was very difficult.



昨日の試験はかなり難しかったです。
Kinou no shiken wa kanari muzukashikatta desu.
Yesterday’s test was quite difficult.

彼はかなりの勉強家です。
kare wa kanari no benkyouka desu.
He’s quite the studier. (*meaning: he studies a lot*)

2. Say 特に (toku ni) when you mean 特に

toku ni has a different meaning from *totemo*: it means “especially” or “particularly.” Many people are in the habit of saying *totemo* all the time for everything because it’s just so easy: stop. ***Totemo* is overworked and tired**. Let it rest and use *toku ni* when you mean “especially.”

この本はとても面白かった。
kono hon wa totemo omoshirokatta.
This book was very interesting.



この本は特に面白かった。
kono hon wa toku ni omoshirokatta.
This book was particularly interesting.

3. Use 非常に (hijou ni) for stronger emphasis

Totemo is a good worker but struggles to adequately convey the stronger meanings, so if you really want to emphasize something, ***hijou ni*** is your go-to word. For example…

東大に入ることがとても難しい。
toudai ni hairu koto ga totemo muzukashii.
It's very difficult to get into Tokyo University. (= but you can if you work at it)



東大に入ることが非常に難しい。
toudai ni hairu koto ga hijou ni muzukashii.
It's VERY difficult to get into Tokyo University. (= nearly impossible)

Hijou ni's kanji literally mean *not* (非) and *everyday* (常), so you could translate it as "*unusually*" or "*abnormally*." But in reality the meaning has been blurred quite a bit; so suffice it to say that this word is just a stronger way to say "very."

4. Say 本当に (hontou ni) when you mean 本当に

Hontou ni means "really", as in… "in reality." This is yet another word whose job all too often gets pushed onto poor old *totemo*. Balance out your vocabulary a little by using this word to show surprise or exceeded expectations, the same way we would do with "really" in English.

あの子ネコはとても小さい。
Ano koneko wa totemo chiisai.
That kitten is very small.



あの子ネコは本当に小さい。
Ano koneko wa hontou ni chiisai.
That kitten is really small.

5. Try casual Japanese equivalents

I almost decided against listing these words because foreigners often overuse these just as much as *totemo*, and I can almost guarantee that your Japanese professors/bosses would prefer you don't use them. But hey, it's the internet!

- **すごく (sugoku)** : "Extremely" (kanji: 凄く)

- **チョー (cho-)**：“Super-” (kanji: 超)
- **めっちゃ (meccha)**：“ridiculously” (this word comes from from 滅茶苦茶/*mechakucha*)
- **マジで(majide)**：“seriously” (this words comes from 真面目/*majime*)

6. Try more advanced words

I wrote this article primarily with beginner to intermediate Japanese learners in mind, but if you’re looking for even more options or if you’re just an ambitious learner, here are some more words that you can jot down and try using instead of *totemo*. I’m not going to get into detailed explanations for them though as this simple blog post has gone on long enough already.

- 結構 (kekkou)
- 相当 (soutou)
- 随分 (zuibun)
- 極めて (kiwamete)
- とんでもない (tondemonai)
- 余計に (yokei ni)
- 余程 (yohodo/yoppodo)
- 前代未聞 (zendaimimon)

7. And if you’re in Nagoya...

…try out saying *totemo* in the local dialect, it’s **“でら” (*dera*)**. Your Nagoyan friends will love love you for it. 

Just for the kanji lovers out there...

Totemo and *kanari* are always written using just plain old hiragana so if you’ve got kanji-phobia like many learners do, you don’t have to be afraid of these words.

But if you’ve got a kanji fetish (like me), or if you’re poring over some Edo-period literature, or if you’re going to be appearing on a Japanese kanji quiz show, you might be interested to know that *totemo* can be written as “迚も” and *kanari* as “可也.”