

Start with the capsule shell. If a supplement comes in a capsule, check whether the label says gelatin, hypromellose, or another specific material—not merely “capsule.” A gelatin shell is animal-derived; a plant-based shell may be suitable for vegans, but you still need to check the rest of the formula. Softgels deserve the same attention: they commonly use gelatin, though some are made with alternatives.

That small detail captures the bigger picture: “vegan” and “gluten-free” describe different things. One is about ingredients and animal-derived materials; the other is about gluten content. Seeing both claims together can be helpful, but it does not automatically tell you how the product was made, whether it was independently tested, or whether it is safe for your particular allergy or dietary needs.

Here’s how to read the claims, spot less obvious ingredients, and decide when supporting documentation is worth requesting.

What “vegan” and “gluten-free” each mean

A vegan claim generally signals that a product contains no animal-derived ingredients. That may include obvious ingredients such as meat, dairy, eggs, or honey, but supplement formulas can also contain animal-derived ingredients in capsules, coatings, flavorings, and processing aids.

In the United States, the phrase “vegan” is not federally defined as a standardized food-labeling claim. That does not mean companies can make any claim they like: advertising and labeling should not be false or misleading. But there is no single federal vegan definition that guarantees every brand uses the term in exactly the same way. When a label says “vegan,” look for details about the ingredients, manufacturing practices, and any third-party marks.



“Gluten-free,” by contrast, has an FDA standard for foods under FDA jurisdiction. A product labeled gluten-free must contain less than 20 parts per million (ppm) of gluten. The threshold also applies to claims such as “no gluten,” “free of gluten,” and “without gluten.” A food may meet the standard through naturally gluten-free ingredients or through [pullulan capsules](#) processing that reduces gluten to the permitted level.

The 20 ppm gluten-free standard does not mean that every product labeled gluten-free has been certified by an outside organization. It also does not mean the food is free of every allergen or suitable for every person with a

medical condition. The claim addresses gluten under the FDA's labeling rules; it does not replace your own medical advice or a careful look at the full label.

Check the shell before the supplement facts

Capsules and softgels can change the answer

Many supplement shoppers go straight to the active ingredients, but the dosage form may be the first place an animal-derived material appears. Common gelatin capsules are usually made from animal collagen. Softgels are also often gelatin-based, and their outer shell may include other ingredients such as glycerin.

Vegetarian or vegan capsule shells are often made from materials such as hypromellose, also called HPMC, or pullulan. Still, do not assume that "vegetarian capsule" means the entire product is vegan. A capsule shell only describes that part of the supplement.

Look for the shell material in the "other ingredients" section or ask the manufacturer to identify it. A label that simply lists "capsule" without naming the material leaves an important question unanswered. If the product is a softgel, ask specifically whether the shell is gelatin-free and whether its glycerin is plant-derived.

Animal-derived ingredients can be easy to miss

Some ingredients have familiar names but can come from more than one source. A manufacturer may use plant, animal, or synthetic sources depending on the ingredient and supplier. When the label does not make the source clear, contact the brand rather than guessing.

- **Gelatin:** Common in capsules, softgels, gummies, and some coatings.
- **Lactose, whey, and casein:** Dairy-derived ingredients that may appear in powders, tablets, or flavored products.
- **Lanolin-derived vitamin D3:** Some vitamin D3 is sourced from sheep's wool; other forms, such as lichen-derived D3, may be suitable for vegans.
- **Glycerin, stearic acid, and magnesium stearate:** These can have different sources, so ask the manufacturer when the source is not specified.
- **Shellac and carmine:** Shellac is an insect-derived coating, while carmine is a red color made from insects.
- **Flavorings:** "Natural flavors" does not tell you, by itself, whether a flavoring is vegan. Ask the brand to clarify its source and whether animal-derived carriers are used.

For supplements, "natural" or "plant-based" is not automatically the same as vegan. Likewise, a clean-looking front label does not replace the ingredient list or allergen statements on the package.

Gluten sources and cross-contact deserve a close read

Gluten is found in wheat, barley, rye, and their crossbred varieties, such as triticale. It can appear in less obvious forms, including malt ingredients and some flavorings or grain-based ingredients. The source and processing of an ingredient matter, so ask the manufacturer when the label is unclear.

Oats require particular care. Pure oats do not naturally contain wheat, barley, or rye gluten, but they can be contaminated during growing, transport, or processing. People who need to avoid gluten should look for oats specifically identified as gluten-free and follow guidance from their healthcare professional.

Cross-contact can happen when gluten-containing ingredients are handled on shared equipment or in shared facilities. A gluten-free claim is governed by the FDA's 20 ppm threshold; it does not necessarily mean the product was made in a dedicated gluten-free facility. If you have celiac disease or another medical reason to avoid gluten strictly, ask the brand about its controls and testing practices.

Read allergen statements as carefully as the front label

Allergen statements answer a different question from vegan and gluten-free claims. In the United States, packaged foods covered by federal rules must identify major food allergens when they are ingredients. These include wheat, milk, eggs, soy, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, crustacean shellfish, and sesame.



Barley and rye are sources of gluten, but they are not among the major allergens that must be declared under the same federal allergen rules. A product's allergen statement therefore may not list every gluten-containing grain. Conversely, a product can be gluten-free but contain a major allergen such as milk or soy.

"May contain" and shared-facility statements are generally voluntary advisory statements, not a substitute for required ingredient declarations. Their absence does not prove that there was no cross-contact. If you have an allergy or celiac disease, read both the ingredient list and any allergen statement, and contact the company when your risk depends on manufacturing details.

What USDA Organic does—and does not—tell you

USDA Organic is a separate claim from vegan and gluten-free. Organic rules address how agricultural ingredients are produced and handled; they do not establish that a product is vegan or gluten-free. An organic product may contain animal-derived ingredients, and an organic claim does not certify that gluten is below 20 ppm.

For products using the USDA organic seal, the common composition categories matter. A product labeled "organic" generally must contain at least 95% organically produced ingredients, excluding added water and salt. The remaining ingredients must meet applicable requirements. Products labeled "made with organic" ingredients generally must contain at least 70% organic ingredients, also excluding water and salt, and cannot use the USDA organic seal in the same way as products in the 95% category.

These percentages do not tell you whether the non-organic ingredients are animal-derived, whether a capsule is gelatin-free, or whether gluten cross-contact was controlled. Treat organic, vegan, and gluten-free as separate claims and verify each one on its own terms.

How to use third-party marks and lab documents

Third-party marks can provide another layer of information, but it helps to know what each one covers. The Certified Vegan mark is associated with Vegan Action, which reviews products against its vegan certification criteria. A recognizable third-party mark can be useful when it appears on the specific product you are considering, but it does not certify gluten-free status unless that is explicitly within the certification's scope.

Not every vegan claim carries a third-party mark, and the absence of a mark does not by itself prove that a product is not vegan. Still, vague "vegan" claims are less informative than a claim backed by clear ingredients, specific sourcing answers, and an identifiable certification. Check that the mark applies to the exact product and formulation—not merely to the brand generally.

Some brands publish **Batch lab reports** or provide a **Certificate of analysis (COA)**. These documents may show test results for a particular batch, such as identity, potency, contaminants, or specified allergens. A COA is not automatically proof of vegan status, and it is only useful for gluten concerns if it includes relevant testing, identifies the product and batch, and explains the test method and result.

Label item or document	What it may help answer	What it does not prove by itself	Vegan claim	Whether the company says the product avoids animal-derived ingredients
That a federal vegan standard or outside certification was used	Gluten-free claim	Whether the product meets the FDA's less-than-20-ppm gluten standard, where applicable	That it is free of every allergen or was made in a dedicated facility	Third-party vegan mark
Whether an outside organization evaluated the product against its vegan criteria	That the product is gluten-free	Batch lab report or COA	What was tested for a particular product or batch, if the report is specific and complete	Anything not listed in the report or a guarantee about every future batch

Brands vary in how much detail they provide. For example, if you are reviewing a supplement from Joy Organics—or any other brand—look at the exact product label and ask targeted questions rather than relying on a company's general "vegan" or "gluten-free" messaging. Coverage in a publication such as *Athleisure Mag* can introduce readers to products, but editorial coverage is not the same as product certification or batch testing.

A practical checklist before you buy

1. **Identify the shell:** Confirm whether a capsule or softgel is gelatin-free and ask for the specific material.
2. **Scan every ingredient:** Check for animal-derived ingredients and unclear sources, including flavors, glycerin, and stearates.
3. **Review gluten sources:** Look for wheat, barley, rye, malt, and any ingredients whose source is unclear.
4. **Read allergen statements:** Do not assume the front label tells the whole story or that an advisory statement covers every risk.
5. **Separate the claims:** Organic, vegan, and gluten-free mean different things. Verify each independently.
6. **Ask for evidence:** Check whether a third-party mark applies to the exact product, and request a relevant Batch lab report or COA if testing details matter to you.

When you contact a brand, ask clear, specific questions: "What material is the capsule shell made from?" "Are the glycerin and natural flavors plant-derived?" "Does this batch have gluten testing, and what was the result in ppm?" "Does the COA identify this product's batch?" Direct questions are more likely to get useful answers than asking simply whether a product is "safe" or "clean."

The bottom line

"Vegan and gluten-free" on one label combines two separate claims—not a single all-purpose guarantee. Vegan labeling is not federally defined as a standardized claim, so ingredient transparency and third-party marks can help you evaluate it. Gluten-free has an FDA threshold of less than 20 ppm, but that claim does not address every allergen, manufacturing question, or individual medical need.

Begin with the capsule shell, check the full ingredient list and allergen statements, and ask the brand to clarify anything ambiguous. When a company provides a relevant, batch-specific lab report or COA, use it to answer the particular question it actually tests. That careful approach is more reliable than letting two appealing words on the front of a package do all the work.