

Short answer: “Vegan” does not have a single, comprehensive federal definition or dedicated set of labeling rules for dietary supplements in the United States. That does not mean a company can make any claim it wants. Supplement labels and advertising must still follow applicable laws against false or misleading claims, and other rules may apply to ingredients, identity, safety, and required disclosures.

For shoppers, the practical takeaway is that a vegan claim can be useful—but it is not, by itself, a guarantee that every ingredient, processing aid, or manufacturing detail has been independently checked. If you are avoiding animal-derived materials, look beyond the front label. Start with the capsule or softgel shell, then check the inactive ingredients and ask the brand for specifics when the label is vague.

What Does the FDA Say About Vegan Supplements?

There is no FDA definition of “vegan” that establishes a universal ingredient checklist for supplements. In other words, when people search for an **FDA vegan definition**, they are unlikely to find a federal standard comparable to a formal certification program. The FDA does regulate dietary supplements in other important ways, including rules about product labeling, ingredient declarations, and claims.

Under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, labels and advertising cannot be false or misleading. Supplement companies are responsible for ensuring that their products are safe and properly labeled. But [gluten-free 20 ppm](#) those general requirements do not spell out, ingredient by ingredient, what “vegan” must mean. That gap leaves room for differences in how brands define and substantiate their own **supplement claims**.



This distinction matters: “not specifically defined by the FDA” does not mean “unregulated in every respect.” A company still needs a reasonable basis for the claims it makes, and other laws or standards may apply to particular ingredients or representations. But shoppers should not assume that the word “vegan” on a bottle has undergone FDA certification or review.

What Do Vegan Label Rules Require?

There is no single federal checklist that says exactly which animal-related ingredients a supplement must exclude to use a vegan claim. As a result, **vegan label rules** in the supplement aisle are less standardized than many

consumers expect. Brands may use “vegan” to describe a formula, a finished product, or a specific feature such as the capsule shell. Those statements are not always interchangeable.

For example, a product may have a plant-based capsule but contain an ingredient sourced from an animal. Conversely, a brand may describe the whole product as vegan, while not clearly explaining its approach to processing aids, supplier practices, or the risk of cross-contact. The label may not answer those questions unless the company chooses to provide more detail.

“Plant-based” is not automatically identical to “vegan,” either. It can be used broadly, and its meaning may not be precise on a supplement label. Likewise, “natural,” “clean,” and “organic” do not mean vegan. Organic certification concerns how products and ingredients meet applicable organic standards; it is not a general animal-free certification.

Check the Capsule or Softgel Shell First

As a label reader, I always check the capsule shell before I move on to the active ingredients. The shell is easy to overlook, yet it can be the deciding factor for someone avoiding animal products. It is also where labels most often leave me wanting a clearer answer: “capsule” is not enough information if the shell material is not identified.

Common capsule materials

- **Gelatin:** A common capsule and softgel material made from animal collagen, often sourced from cattle or pigs. A gelatin shell is not vegan.
- **HPMC:** Hydroxypropyl methylcellulose, a cellulose-based material commonly used for vegetarian or vegan hard capsules. Check the rest of the formula too; a plant-based shell does not make every ingredient vegan.
- **Pullulan:** A material made through fermentation that is used for some capsule shells. Ask the brand whether the specific product and its other components meet its vegan criteria.
- **Starch or other plant-based materials:** Some capsules use these materials, but the label or manufacturer should identify the shell rather than leaving you to infer it from the product’s marketing.

Softgels deserve extra attention. Traditional softgels often use gelatin, so a liquid supplement in a softgel is not automatically vegan just because its oil or other active ingredient comes from plants. Some companies make non-gelatin alternatives, but the shell composition should be stated or confirmed by the manufacturer.

Also look for ingredients such as glycerin, which can come from either plant or animal sources. If the source is not specified, the ingredient name alone may not tell you whether it fits your needs. Ask the brand directly. I would rather send one straightforward email than guess based on a label that says only “capsule.”

Hidden Animal-Derived Ingredients to Watch For

Animal-derived ingredients are not always obvious from the product name or the active ingredient list. Some are familiar to supplement users; others are easy to miss. The source can also vary between suppliers, so an ingredient’s name may not reveal its origin.

- **Gelatin:** May appear in capsules, softgels, or as an ingredient in a gummy supplement.
- **Collagen:** Usually animal-derived, although a product may use the term “vegan collagen” for a blend intended to support the body’s own collagen production. Read what is actually in the formula.
- **Lanolin-derived vitamin D3:** Some vitamin D3 is sourced from sheep’s wool. Lichen-derived D3 is a vegan alternative, but the source should be confirmed.

- **Fish oil, krill oil, and other marine ingredients:** These are not vegan, even when presented as common wellness ingredients.
- **Beeswax, honey, and royal jelly:** These are animal-derived, and may appear in certain tablets, liquids, or gummy products.
- **Glycerin, stearic acid, and magnesium stearate:** These can be derived from plant or animal sources, depending on the ingredient and supplier. The name alone may not settle the question.
- **Natural flavors:** The term does not tell you whether a flavoring is vegan. If it matters, ask the manufacturer what the phrase covers for that product.

Excipients and processing aids can complicate the picture. A label may list ingredients in the finished product without explaining every material used earlier in manufacturing. Companies may have supplier information that is not printed on the bottle, so a clear customer-service response can be useful. Ask a specific question—such as whether the capsule shell, glycerin, and flavoring are animal-free—rather than relying on a general “yes, it’s clean” reply.

What a Vegan Claim Does—and Does Not—Tell You

A vegan claim can signal that a company intends to exclude animal-derived ingredients. But without a shared federal definition, it may not tell you precisely how the company applies that intention. The claim alone may not explain whether the brand checks the source of ingredients that can be plant- or animal-derived, what it does about processing aids, or how it handles potential cross-contact during manufacturing.

It also does not establish that a supplement is:

- Organic or non-GMO.
- Free from allergens, gluten, or every animal-related manufacturing input.
- More effective or safer than a non-vegan product.
- Independently tested for purity, potency, or contaminants.
- Approved or certified by the FDA.

Those are separate questions. A vegan claim is about the product’s relationship to animal-derived materials as defined by the company or a certifier. It is not a substitute for evaluating ingredient amounts, evidence for the product’s intended use, manufacturing quality, or any relevant safety considerations.

How Third-Party Vegan Verification Helps

Third-party verification can make a vegan claim easier to assess because an outside organization applies its own standard rather than leaving the meaning entirely to the brand. One example is **Certified Vegan**, a private certification program. Its mark indicates that a product has been reviewed under that program’s criteria; it is not an FDA endorsement and should not be confused with government approval.



Certification can be a useful shortcut, but it is still worth understanding what is being certified. Look for the certifier's name, verify that the product or brand is covered, and review the program's current criteria if a specific sourcing or manufacturing detail matters to you. A logo copied into an online listing is not the same thing as verifying the product in the certifier's directory.

Some brands provide useful sourcing information even when a product does not display a vegan certification mark. For instance, Joy Organics is a company consumers may encounter while researching supplements and wellness products; as with any brand, check the specific product's label and ask for current documentation rather than assuming every item shares the same ingredients or verification. Athleisure Mag and other active-lifestyle publications can help readers understand supplement-label questions, but editorial coverage is not a substitute for a manufacturer's ingredient disclosure or a certifier's standards.

A Practical Checklist for Evaluating a Vegan Supplement

1. **Read the full ingredient panel.** Do not stop at the front label or the active ingredients.
2. **Identify the delivery format.** Check whether the product is a hard capsule, softgel, tablet, powder, gummy, or liquid.
3. **Confirm the shell material.** Look for a named material such as HPMC, pullulan, or gelatin. If the label only says "capsule," contact the brand.
4. **Ask about ingredients with variable sources.** This may include glycerin, stearic acid, magnesium stearate, vitamin D3, and natural flavors.
5. **Look for the certifier, not just the word.** If a product carries a third-party vegan mark, confirm what product it applies to and what the certification covers.
6. **Request written clarification.** A clear response should address the specific ingredient or manufacturing question, not just repeat the marketing claim.
7. **Evaluate other quality needs separately.** Vegan status does not tell you whether a product has been tested for identity, potency, or contaminants.

For competitive athletes, that last point matters. A vegan claim does not mean a product has been screened for substances prohibited by a sport governing body. If you compete, look for a relevant sport-specific certification or

testing program, check its current product directory, and understand what the program does and does not test for. Testing status and vegan status answer different questions.

Where Batch Lab Reports and a COA Fit In

Brands may publish **batch lab reports** or provide a **certificate of analysis (COA)** to show testing information for a particular product or lot. These documents can be helpful, especially when they identify the tested batch and explain which tests were performed. A COA might cover identity, potency, or certain contaminants, depending on the product and the laboratory.

But a COA is not automatically a vegan certificate. Standard lab testing generally cannot establish that every ingredient, capsule component, flavoring, or processing aid is animal-free. Ask what the report tests, who performed the testing, and whether it corresponds to the batch you have. For vegan sourcing questions, supplier documentation and a clear explanation from the manufacturer—or a relevant third-party vegan certification—are more directly useful.

What you want to know What may help answer it What it does not prove by itself Is the capsule shell animal-free? Label details, manufacturer confirmation, or vegan certification That all other ingredients are vegan Does this batch meet certain quality specifications? Batch lab reports or a certificate of analysis (COA) That the product is vegan or sport-certified Is the vegan claim checked by an outside organization? A verifiable third-party certification, such as Certified Vegan FDA approval, clinical effectiveness, or testing for every contaminant

The Bottom Line

In the US, “vegan” is not a term with one comprehensive FDA definition for supplement labels. General laws still prohibit false or misleading claims, but the word itself does not function as a universal federal guarantee. That makes careful label reading—and, sometimes, a direct question to the brand—important.

Start with the capsule or softgel shell, then check ingredients that may come from either plant or animal sources. Treat “organic,” “plant-based,” “natural,” and “vegan” as distinct claims. Third-party verification can add confidence, while batch lab reports and a COA can help answer separate questions about a particular lot’s testing. No single logo or document answers everything, but together with a specific, written manufacturer response, they can help you make a more informed choice.