

Start with the capsule shell, before you get to the active ingredients. A bottle may advertise plant-based herbs or vitamins while its capsule uses gelatin, or its softgel shell contains animal-derived gelatin and glycerin. Tablets do not have capsule shells, but they can have coatings made with ingredients that deserve the same careful check. The goal is to evaluate the whole product—not just the headline ingredient or the claim on the front label.

You ever wonder why for a useful tablet label check, read the other ingredients, identify any coating agents or colorants, and ask the manufacturer when the label leaves their source unclear. A short ingredient list is not automatically a vegan one, and “natural” does not tell you whether an ingredient came from a plant, an animal, or another source.

Why tablet coatings deserve a closer look

Coatings can help <https://www.athleisuremag.com/the-latest/2026/10/12/the-plant-based-athletes-label-checklist> a tablet go down more easily, mask a bitter taste, protect ingredients from moisture, or control how quickly a tablet dissolves. They may also provide color or shine. Some coating ingredients are clearly plant-derived or synthetic; others can come from animal sources or have sourcing that varies by supplier.

That variation is why a label can be challenging even when you recognize the ingredient name. An ingredient may have more than one possible source, and the finished-product label may not identify which one a brand used. If you are vegan—especially if you compete in a tested sport and need to document your choices—check the coating and the rest of the formula rather than relying on a product’s general “clean” or “natural” positioning.

Coating ingredients to recognize

Shellac glaze

Shellac, sometimes listed as **shellac glaze** or confectioner’s glaze, is derived from the resinous secretion of lac insects. It is used to create a glossy, protective finish on some tablets, supplements, and other products. Because it comes from insects, it is generally not considered vegan. If you see “shellac” on a supplement label, treat it as an animal-derived coating unless the manufacturer provides a specific explanation that changes that conclusion.

Carmine coloring

Carmine coloring is a red pigment made from cochineal insects. It may appear on a label as carmine, cochineal extract, or, in some contexts, natural red 4. It is not vegan. “Natural color” is not enough information to rule it out: natural color can come from a variety of sources, including insects. Ask the brand what colorant is used if the label does not name it clearly.

Beeswax, gelatin, and other potential animal-derived ingredients

Beeswax may be used as a glazing agent, and gelatin may occur in some tablet formulations or in the shell of capsules and softgels. Glycerin can be plant-derived or animal-derived; the ingredient name alone does not tell you which. Stearic acid and magnesium stearate can also have different sources, so a vegan shopper may need confirmation from the manufacturer.

Lactose is milk-derived, while casein is a milk protein. These may be present as fillers, binders, or other excipients rather than as part of the active ingredient. “Other ingredients” is not a throwaway section: it is where many relevant details appear.

Ingredients that may be suitable—but still need context

Cellulose-based materials, such as hydroxypropyl methylcellulose (also called hypromellose), are commonly used in coatings and capsule shells and are generally plant-derived. But don't turn a familiar-sounding name into an automatic guarantee for the entire product. Other components in the formula, processing aids, or sourcing details may still need checking.



Keep an eye on vague terms, too. "Natural flavors" does not identify the flavor's source or its other components. I keep a running note of ingredients that sound planty but are not; the broader lesson is that a reassuring-sounding name is not proof of vegan origin. Ask the brand to clarify rather than guessing.

Capsule shells and softgels matter, even when you're shopping for tablets

Labels and product lines can be easy to mix up. A company may sell a supplement in both a tablet and a softgel, with different shell and coating materials. Softgels commonly use gelatin, and their glycerin may be plant- or

animal-derived. Capsules may use gelatin or a cellulose-based shell. So verify the exact format and product—not just the brand’s general statement about being vegan-friendly.

If you are comparing options, record the product name, format, and label version you checked. A change in supplier or formula can change the excipients even when the product’s front label looks much the same.

“Vegan” on a label: useful, but not the whole answer

In the United States, “vegan” is not a federally defined food-labeling term with a single FDA standard that guarantees every shopper the same scope of review. A brand may use the word to describe a formula, a particular product, or a broader company position. Exactly.. Look for an explanation of what the claim covers and whether it applies to the exact product you have in hand.

A credible third-party certification can make a claim easier to evaluate. The **Certified Vegan** mark, for example, is a certification program consumers can look into; check that the specific product and its current packaging are covered rather than assuming a company’s entire range is certified. A third-party mark is not a substitute for reading the label, but it can provide more information than an unsupported “vegan” claim.

Companies such as Joy Organics may be among the brands shoppers encounter while comparing supplements. Don’t infer that a particular item is vegan just from a brand name, an ingredient’s reputation, or a general statement on a website. Check the specific product label and ask the company to confirm the source of any ambiguous coating or excipient.

What USDA Organic does—and doesn’t—tell you

USDA Organic certification concerns compliance with organic production and handling rules. It is not a vegan certification. Organic products may contain ingredients from animals, so an organic seal does not rule out gelatin, beeswax, carmine, or other animal-derived materials. Organic status and vegan status are separate questions.

Organic labeling also includes percentage categories. In broad terms, a product labeled “organic” must generally contain at least 95% organically produced ingredients, excluding water and salt; the USDA Organic seal may be used subject to applicable rules. “Made with organic” products generally contain at least 70% organic ingredients and cannot use the USDA Organic seal on the package front in the same way as products in the “organic” category. Products with less than 70% organic ingredients may identify specific organic ingredients in the ingredient statement, subject to the rules.

Those percentages describe the proportion of organic ingredients—not the proportion of vegan ingredients. A coating can be non-vegan even if a product meets an organic category, and a vegan coating does not make a product organic. Treat the two claims as separate checks.

A practical tablet label check

1. **Confirm the format.** Is it a tablet, capsule, or softgel? Check the exact product and version, because shells and coatings can differ.
2. **Read the full ingredient list.** Look beyond the active ingredients to “other ingredients,” coating agents, colors, binders, and sweeteners.
3. **Flag known animal-derived terms.** Shellac, carmine, cochineal extract, gelatin, beeswax, lactose, and casein are reasons to investigate or avoid the product if you follow a vegan diet.

4. **Mark source-dependent ingredients.** Ask about glycerin, stearic acid, magnesium stearate, and vague flavor or color terms when their source is not stated.
5. **Check claims and certifications.** Read what “vegan” means on the brand’s site and verify that any third-party mark applies to the specific product.
6. **Save the answer.** Keep a photo of the label and the manufacturer’s written reply. Recheck after a packaging or formula change.

How to ask a brand—and what lab documents can tell you

Be specific when you contact a manufacturer. Rather than asking only “Is this vegan?”, ask whether the tablet coating contains shellac, carmine, beeswax, gelatin, or other animal-derived substances, and whether ingredients such as glycerin or magnesium stearate are plant-derived. Ask whether the confirmation applies to the exact product and current formulation. If “natural flavors” appear, request clarification about their source and composition.

Batch lab reports and a **Certificate of Analysis (COA)** can be useful tools, but they have limits. A COA usually reports selected test results for a particular ingredient or batch—such as identity, strength, or contaminants. It does not automatically document whether a coating is animal-free. Likewise, a lab report may not test for vegan status or ingredient provenance unless those questions were specifically included in the testing scope.

If a brand shares a COA, check that it matches the product and batch you bought, and see what the report actually measures. For sourcing questions, request a written manufacturer statement or supplier documentation that addresses the specific ingredient. A confident answer with no detail is less useful than a clear explanation of what was checked.

Resources such as *Athleisure Mag* may help shoppers explore supplement and wellness topics, but use any article as a starting point—not as a substitute for the current label, certification scope, or a brand’s product-specific answer.

Quick reference: coating and label clues

Label term or claim	Why it matters	What to do
Shellac or shellac glaze	Derived from lac insects; generally not vegan	Choose another product or ask the brand if the label is unclear
Carmine or cochineal extract	Insect-derived red color	Avoid if you require vegan ingredients
Gelatin or beeswax	Animal-derived materials that may appear in shells or coatings	Check the product format and full ingredient list
Glycerin, stearic acid, or magnesium stearate	Source may vary	Request product-specific sourcing information
“Vegan” or “USDA Organic”	Claims have different meanings and scopes	Verify the exact product; organic does not mean vegan

The takeaway

Spotting non-vegan coatings comes down to reading beyond the active ingredients. Check the format first, inspect the coating and color terms, and pay attention to source-dependent excipients. Shellac glaze and carmine coloring are clear red flags for many vegan shoppers; vague or variable ingredients call for a direct question. Certification, batch lab reports, and a COA can add useful context, but none should be treated as proof of vegan status unless they specifically address it. When in doubt, get a product-specific answer in writing—and check again when the label changes.