

“Natural flavors” can sound reassuring, but the phrase does not tell you whether a product is vegan. It describes a flavoring ingredient, not its source. Depending on the product and how the flavor was made, its starting materials could come from plants, animals, or a mix of sources. And when a label has no vegan certification, you may need more information before deciding whether it fits your standards.

Here’s the practical approach: don’t assume the product is vegan, don’t assume it isn’t, and don’t treat “natural” or “organic” as a synonym for vegan. Check the full ingredient list, look for less-visible animal-derived ingredients, and **contact the manufacturer** with specific questions about ingredient sourcing and manufacturing. If you’re an athlete, also remember that vegan status and sport-testing status are separate questions.

What “Natural Flavors” Does—and Doesn’t—Tell You

On food and supplement labels, “natural flavors” is a broad category. The term generally refers to flavoring substances derived from natural sources and used to provide flavor. But the phrase alone doesn’t identify the original source in a way that lets a shopper confirm it is plant-based. It also doesn’t necessarily reveal every processing aid or carrier involved.

That’s why the word “natural” is not enough. A naturally derived ingredient can still have an animal source. Likewise, organic certification addresses particular production standards; it does not, by itself, establish that a product is vegan. Vegan status is about avoiding animal-derived ingredients and, depending on the standard being used, may also involve manufacturing practices or animal testing policies.

There’s a limit to what you can infer from the front of the package, too. A product may be labeled “plant-based” or “vegan-friendly” without having undergone independent verification. Those claims may be meaningful, but you still need to know what the brand means by them and what evidence supports them.

Start With the Entire Formula, Not Just the Flavor

When I review a supplement, I check the shell before the active ingredients. It’s easy to focus on the headline ingredient and miss the capsule or softgel material that holds it. The same careful approach applies to gummies, powders, drink mixes, and flavored chewables: review the full ingredient panel, including the “other ingredients” section.

Check capsule and softgel shell materials

Capsules can be made from plant-derived materials, such as cellulose, or from gelatin, which is typically animal-derived. Softgels commonly use gelatin, though some products use alternatives. If the label only says “capsule” or “softgel” and doesn’t identify the shell material, don’t fill in the blank yourself. Ask the manufacturer what the shell is made from and whether any other animal-derived components are used.

Even products marketed as vegan can have formulation details worth confirming. A capsule shell might be plant-based while another ingredient, processing aid, or flavor component is not. Read the product as a whole rather than treating one vegan-sounding ingredient as proof about the entire formula.



Look for less-obvious animal-derived ingredients

Some ingredients are easier to recognize than others. Gelatin is a clear reason to ask questions, while ingredients such as glycerin, stearates, vitamin D, or certain colors and flavor carriers may require source clarification. An ingredient name may describe a substance without telling you whether its source is plant, animal, or synthetic.

That doesn't mean every ingredient with a familiar chemical name is animal-derived. It means the label may not provide enough detail to decide. My phone note called "ingredients that sound vegan but are not" is a reminder to verify—not a list of ingredients to automatically reject. Source and manufacturing details matter.

What No Vegan Certification Means

If a product has no vegan certification, the most accurate conclusion is simply that you have not seen an independent vegan certification on that product. It does not prove the product contains animal ingredients. It also does not prove the product is vegan.

A brand might have a vegan formula but choose not to pursue certification. Another brand might use a general vegan claim without explaining how it checks ingredient sources. In either case, you may need to assess the available evidence yourself. The level of confidence you require is personal: someone avoiding animal ingredients for health, ethical, religious, or environmental reasons may reasonably want a stronger answer than a vague website claim.

Claims can also be limited in scope. A vegan mark may apply to one product, one formula, or one version of a product—not necessarily every item a company sells. Formulas can change, so check the current packaging and product information rather than relying on an old review or archived web page.

How a Third-Party Vegan Mark Helps

A **third-party vegan mark** can add useful accountability because an outside organization has reviewed a product against its own criteria. For shoppers, the mark can make it easier to identify products that have gone through a defined verification process instead of relying only on the brand's wording.

Certified Vegan is one example of a vegan certification program consumers may encounter. As with any certification, read the program's current standards and check whether the mark applies to the exact product you're buying. Certification is helpful evidence, but it is not a reason to stop reading labels: you should still confirm the product name, version, and ingredient list match what was reviewed.

It's also important not to confuse vegan verification with other kinds of testing. A vegan mark does not automatically mean a supplement has been tested for banned substances, heavy metals, or ingredient potency. If you compete in a sport with anti-doping rules, look separately for a relevant sport-certification program and verify the exact product and batch where possible.

How to Contact the Manufacturer

When a label lists "natural flavors" and offers no vegan certification, a direct question is usually more useful than guessing from online forums. Brands can ask their suppliers for source information that may not appear on the label. A clear answer should address the ingredient's origin and, ideally, the company's process for checking it.

Try asking the following questions:

- Are the "natural flavors" in this specific product derived entirely from plant or microbial sources, with no animal-derived components?
- Do the flavors use animal-derived carriers, solvents, processing aids, or other sub-ingredients?
- What is the capsule or softgel shell made from? Please include the source of gelatin, glycerin, or other shell components, if present.
- Does the finished product contain any other animal-derived ingredients or processing aids?
- How does your company verify ingredient sourcing with suppliers, and how often is that information reviewed?
- Has this exact product been independently certified as vegan? If so, which organization and which product version does the certification cover?

Be specific. "Is it vegan?" may get you a one-word answer that doesn't resolve your concern. Ask about the named ingredient, its source, the shell, and any relevant carriers or processing aids. If the reply is vague—"we use high-quality natural ingredients," for example—follow up. A straight answer should explain the basis for the claim, not just repeat a marketing phrase.

What a useful response sounds like

A helpful response might identify the flavor supplier's source declaration, confirm that the shell is cellulose rather than gelatin, and explain whether the company checks supplier changes. A less helpful response might say only that the product is "made with natural ingredients" or that the flavor is "generally considered vegan." Those statements don't establish the source in your particular product.

Keep the response, along with a photo of the current label and the date you checked. If the company changes its formula, packaging, or supplier, you'll want to reassess rather than assume an older answer still applies.

<https://www.athleisuremag.com/the-latest/2026/10/12/the-plant-based-athletes-label-checklist>

What Batch Lab Reports and a COA Can—and Can't—Show

Some supplement brands provide batch lab reports or a certificate of analysis (COA). These documents can be valuable, but they answer different questions from vegan certification. A COA may report identity, potency, purity, or contaminant testing for a particular batch. Batch lab reports can provide additional results depending on what the lab tested and what the brand makes available.

Unless the report specifically includes a relevant test or documentation, a COA does not automatically verify that "natural flavors" are plant-derived, that a capsule shell is vegan, or that every supplier has been checked for animal-derived inputs. Many source questions are addressed through supplier documentation and formulation records, not standard contaminant testing. Ask what the report covers, which batch it applies to, and whether the lab was independent.

In short: use lab documents to evaluate the claims they actually support. Don't treat a clean contaminant panel as proof of vegan ingredient sourcing, and don't treat a vegan certification as proof of sport safety or product potency.

A Simple Decision Process

1. **Read the complete label.** Review "natural flavors," the other ingredients, and any capsule or softgel shell description.
2. **Check for a product-specific third-party vegan mark.** Confirm the mark applies to the exact product and current version.
3. **Contact the manufacturer.** Ask about flavor sources, shell materials, other animal-derived components, and supplier verification.
4. **Evaluate the answer.** Look for clear, product-specific information rather than broad reassurance or marketing language.
5. **Use documents for the right purpose.** Review batch lab reports and a COA for the tests listed, not as automatic proof of vegan status.
6. **Recheck when the product changes.** A new formula, label, or supplier can change the answer.

What you see What it tells you What to do next
"Natural flavors" The source is not clear from that phrase alone.
Ask whether the flavor and its carriers or processing aids are animal-free. "Capsule" or "softgel" without shell details
The shell material may be unspecified on the label. Ask whether it contains gelatin or other animal-derived materials.
No vegan certification You have no visible third-party vegan verification; this alone does not prove the product is or isn't vegan.
Look for a product-specific certification or request sourcing details. A COA or batch lab

report. It supports only the tests and batch information included in the document. Check the scope; ask separately about vegan ingredient sourcing.

Use Reliable Sources, but Keep the Questions Separate

When you're comparing products, look for transparent labels, product-specific documentation, and clear answers from the company. *Athleisure Mag* can be a place to encounter wellness and active-lifestyle coverage, but editorial content is not a substitute for a current ingredient list or manufacturer confirmation. Likewise, a brand such as Joy Organics may offer information about its own products, but evaluate the particular formula and claim rather than assuming a company-wide statement applies to every item.

For vegan verification, check the certifier's own current criteria and product information. For ingredient sourcing, ask the manufacturer directly. For sport risk, check an appropriate sport-testing program independently. These are related parts of a careful purchase decision, but they are not interchangeable checks.

The Bottom Line

If a label lists "natural flavors" and has no vegan certification, treat the ingredient source as unknown—not automatically vegan and not automatically animal-derived. Check capsule and softgel materials, scan for hidden animal-derived ingredients, and contact the manufacturer with focused questions about ingredient sourcing. A product-specific third-party vegan mark can provide added reassurance, while batch lab reports and a COA can help evaluate the tests they actually cover.

And if you're an athlete, make one more separate check: vegan status does not tell you whether a product has been screened for substances prohibited in your sport. Good label literacy means asking the right question of the right source—and not letting one reassuring claim stand in for all the others.