

Start with the capsule shell—not the vitamin D3. A product can use vitamin D3 from a plant-based source and still come in an animal-derived softgel. Check the capsule or softgel material first, then trace the D3 source and review the rest of the ingredients. The front-label word “vegan” is a useful clue, but it is not enough by itself.

This matters because the most common traditional source of vitamin D3 is lanolin, a waxy substance obtained from sheep’s wool. Vegan D3 supplements generally use D3 made from lichen instead. Here’s how to check the whole product, not just the headline ingredient.

1. Check the capsule shell and softgel

Look in the “Other ingredients” section for the shell material. A standard softgel is often made with gelatin, which is typically derived from animals. If the label lists only “softgel” or “capsule” without saying what it is made from, you don’t have enough information to confirm it is vegan.

Some products use vegetarian or plant-based shells made from materials such as modified starch, cellulose, or other plant-based polymers. But don’t assume that “vegetarian capsule” answers every question: it may tell you something about the shell without confirming that the active ingredient, processing aids, or the entire product meet vegan standards.

- **Potential red flag:** gelatin, unless the company provides a clear explanation showing it is not animal-derived.
- **More reassuring:** a specifically identified plant-based capsule material, such as cellulose or starch.
- **Needs clarification:** “capsule,” “softgel,” or “vegetarian capsule” with no material or sourcing details.

For a softgel, ask about both the shell and the liquid inside. The shell might be plant-based while the D3 is sourced from lanolin—or the D3 might come from lichen while the shell contains gelatin. You need both pieces of information.

2. Find out where the vitamin D3 comes from

Vitamin D3 from lanolin

Lanolin is a substance found in sheep’s wool. It is commonly used as a starting material for vitamin D3, also called cholecalciferol. Although the wool is shorn rather than the sheep being used for the D3 itself, lanolin is still animal-derived, so D3 made from it is not vegan.

Labels may say “vitamin D3” or “cholecalciferol” without identifying its source. Neither name tells you whether it came from lanolin or a plant-based source. If the package does not specify, contact the company and ask directly: “Is the vitamin D3 in this product sourced from lanolin, lichen, or another material?”

Vitamin D3 from lichen

Lichen-derived D3 is a common vegan alternative. Lichens are organisms made up of a partnership between a fungus and an alga or a photosynthetic partner. Companies can use them as a source of D3 without relying on sheep’s wool.



Look for phrases such as “lichen-derived vitamin D3” or “vegan D3.” If the label only says “plant-based D3,” ask what the source is. Clear sourcing language is more useful than a broad claim. Also check that the D3 source is vegan *and* that the capsule, carriers, and other ingredients are acceptable to you.

3. Read the full ingredient list for animal-derived ingredients

Small supporting ingredients can complicate an otherwise promising formula. Scan the complete ingredient list, including the “Other ingredients” panel, and check allergen statements as well. A clean-looking front label does not replace that review.

- **Gelatin:** commonly used in capsules and softgels; usually animal-derived.
- **Glycerin:** can come from plant or animal sources. Ask the brand if the source is not stated.
- **Stearic acid or magnesium stearate:** may be plant- or animal-derived. The ingredient name alone may not tell you which.
- **Beeswax:** an animal-derived ingredient that can appear in coatings or other product components.
- **Shellac:** an insect-derived resin that may be used as a coating.
- **Carriers and flavorings:** check the source of oils, flavors, and other ingredients when it is not clear from the label.

“Natural flavors” is not a source statement. If a product includes natural flavors and you want to verify vegan status, ask the company for clarification rather than assuming they are plant-derived. Keep an eye out for ingredients that sound planty but are not necessarily vegan—and for ingredients whose source can vary by supplier.

4. Understand what “vegan” on a label does—and doesn’t—mean

In the United States, “vegan” is not a federally defined standard for dietary supplements in the way some shoppers assume. A company may use the word to describe a product, but the term by itself does not tell you what criteria were used, whether every ingredient was reviewed, or whether an independent organization checked the claim.

Look for specific sourcing details and, where applicable, a recognizable third-party certification. Certified Vegan is one example of a private certification mark shoppers may encounter. Check that the mark is current and applies to

the product you are buying. A certification can be a helpful shortcut, but it does not replace reading the label—especially if you have allergies, sensitivities, or additional standards you follow.

Retail and wellness articles, including coverage from *Athleisure Mag*, can be useful starting points for discovering products or understanding claims. Treat editorial mentions as a lead, not as proof of ingredient sourcing. For a specific bottle, the best answers come from its current label and the company's documentation.

5. Know what USDA Organic does—and doesn't—tell you

"Organic" and "vegan" describe different things. USDA Organic rules address how qualifying agricultural ingredients are produced and how organic claims may be presented. They do not, on their own, establish that a product is vegan or that its vitamin D3 comes from lichen rather than lanolin.

For products using USDA organic labeling, the percentage of organic ingredients affects the allowed claim. Broadly, a product labeled "organic" generally needs at least 95% organic ingredients, while a product labeled "made with organic" ingredients generally needs at least 70%. Products with less than 70% organic content may identify organic ingredients in the ingredient statement but cannot use "organic" in the same way as the higher-percentage categories. Requirements can depend on product type and labeling details, so check the actual certification and claim rather than relying on a front-label impression.

Even a high organic percentage does not answer the vegan question. Ask separately about the D3 source, capsule shell, and any ingredients of uncertain origin. Organic status is not a substitute for a vegan certification or clear sourcing information.

6. Use batch documents wisely

A **Certificate of analysis (COA)** and **Batch lab reports** can athleisuremag.com help you assess quality, but they don't automatically prove that a supplement is vegan. A COA typically reports tests such as identity, potency, and certain contaminants. Unless it specifically documents ingredient origin or includes relevant sourcing information, it may not tell you whether the D3 came from lanolin or lichen.

When checking batch documents, make sure the report matches the product and lot number on your bottle. A generic report with no batch identification is less useful for verifying that particular bottle. You can ask the company for the COA for your lot, and separately ask for written confirmation of the D3 and capsule sources.

Companies vary in how much documentation they publish. For example, if you are considering a product from Joy Organics, apply the same checks you would to any brand: read the current label, look for product-specific sourcing information, and request supporting documentation when a detail is missing. A brand name or a general quality statement cannot answer every ingredient question.

7. A practical checklist before you buy

1. **Identify the capsule material.** If it says only "capsule" or "softgel," ask what it is made from.
2. **Confirm the D3 source.** Look for lichen-derived D3 or get a direct answer about lanolin.
3. **Read every ingredient.** Check for gelatin, beeswax, shellac, and ingredients such as glycerin or stearates that may have different sources.
4. **Review allergen statements.** Don't skip them because the front of the bottle looks clean.
5. **Evaluate vegan claims.** Look for specific sourcing details and check whether any certification mark is current and product-specific.

6. **Request documents if needed.** Ask for the relevant batch lab reports or COA, while remembering that a lab report may confirm potency without confirming vegan origin.

What you see What it tells you What to check next “Vitamin D3” or “cholecalciferol” The form of vitamin D, not necessarily its source Ask whether it is derived from lichen or lanolin “Lichen-derived D3” A plant-based source for the D3 ingredient Check the shell and the rest of the formula “Softgel” or “capsule” The product format, not the shell material Ask whether the shell contains gelatin or another animal-derived ingredient “USDA Organic” An organic-production and labeling claim Verify vegan sourcing separately COA or batch lab report May provide batch-specific quality and testing information Check the lot number and ask whether ingredient origin is documented

What to ask a supplement company

If the label leaves a gap, send a concise message with specific questions. Vague questions often get vague replies. You can ask:

- Is the vitamin D3 in this exact product derived from lichen, lanolin, or another source?
- What is the capsule or softgel shell made from?
- Are the glycerin, stearates, flavors, and carriers plant-derived?
- Does any part of the product contain gelatin, beeswax, shellac, or other animal-derived materials?
- Can you provide the current product specification and the COA or batch lab reports for my lot?

Look for a clear, product-specific answer. If the company only repeats “vegan-friendly” without explaining the D3 source and shell material, you still have a reasonable basis to ask for clarification—or choose a supplement with more transparent sourcing.



The bottom line

To check whether a vitamin D3 supplement is vegan, verify two things first: the shell and the D3 source. Avoid assuming a softgel is plant-based, and don’t treat “D3” as proof of lanolin or lichen either way. Then review every ingredient, read allergen statements, and interpret organic claims separately from vegan claims. A transparent

company should be able to tell you where its D3 comes from and what the capsule is made of. If it can also provide product-specific documentation, you can make a more informed choice.