

Start with the capsule shell. If you're choosing a CBD product for a plant-based diet or a tested sport, the shell can matter just as much as the hemp extract inside it. A capsule may contain broad-spectrum CBD and still use a gelatin shell—or include other ingredients whose sources aren't clear from the front label.

"THC-free broad-spectrum CBD" generally means a hemp extract has been processed to remove detectable tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), while retaining CBD and potentially other hemp compounds. But those words are not a guarantee that every batch contains absolutely zero THC, that the product is vegan, or that its label tells the whole story. For that, you need the full ingredient list and batch-specific testing.

First, Check the Capsule Shell and Softgel

Capsules often look simple, but their materials can determine whether a product suits your diet. A hard capsule may be made from gelatin or plant-based materials such as hypromellose (also called HPMC) or pullulan. A softgel is commonly made with gelatin, though <https://www.athleisuremag.com/the-latest/2026/10/12/the-plant-based-athletes-label-checklist> alternatives exist. "Capsule" by itself does not tell you what the shell is made of.

Gelatin is usually animal-derived, often from bovine or porcine sources. If you avoid animal ingredients, look for a specific shell material rather than relying on a vague "vegan" callout. For a softgel, ask the brand to identify both the shell and any plasticizers, such as glycerin, and confirm whether those materials are plant-derived.

Glycerin can come from plant or animal sources. The same goes for some other ingredients used in manufacturing or as flow agents. A label may list magnesium stearate without specifying its source; it can be derived from plant oils or animal fats. Not every capsule contains these ingredients, but when it does, the source may require confirmation from the manufacturer.



I keep a running note of "ingredients that sound planty but are not," because names alone can be misleading. And if a brand lists "natural flavors," ask what that means in the specific product. The phrase doesn't provide enough detail to establish whether flavor components are vegan or suitable for your needs.

What "Broad-Spectrum CBD" Usually Means

Hemp extracts can contain CBD (cannabidiol) alongside other cannabinoids and plant compounds. Broad-spectrum CBD generally refers to an extract that retains CBD and may include additional cannabinoids or terpenes, while THC has been removed during processing. In contrast, a CBD isolate is intended to contain CBD alone, while full-spectrum products may contain THC within applicable legal limits.

These terms describe product categories, not a guarantee of a particular chemical profile. Broad-spectrum products can differ in which cannabinoids remain, how much CBD they contain, and what testing detects. A capsule advertised as broad-spectrum may not contain a meaningful amount of every cannabinoid associated with hemp. Check the product's test results instead of assuming the name explains the formula.

What “THC-free” Does—and Doesn’t—Tell You

THC-free labeling typically means the manufacturer intends the product to contain no THC, or no THC detectable by its chosen test method. “Not detected” is not the same as proving that no THC molecule is present. A test has limits: the result depends on the method, sample preparation, and the laboratory's detection or quantification thresholds.

That distinction can matter if you are subject to drug testing. A product with a THC-free claim may still carry some risk if testing does not cover the relevant compounds, if a batch differs from the one tested, or if cross-contamination occurs. If avoiding THC is essential, consider whether CBD is appropriate for you at all, and ask the brand about its testing procedures and controls. No label can guarantee a negative drug test.

Also distinguish a THC-free claim from the federal hemp definition. Hemp is generally distinguished from marijuana under federal law by a delta-9 THC threshold of no more than 0.3% on a dry-weight basis. That threshold does not mean a product marketed as “THC-free” has been verified at zero, nor does it explain how the finished capsule was tested.

How to Read a Certificate of Analysis (COA)

A **Certificate of Analysis (COA)** is a laboratory report for a tested sample. For CBD capsules, a useful COA should be tied to the finished product or clearly explain whether it tests the bulk extract instead. Ideally, it identifies the product, batch or lot number, test date, laboratory, and methods used.

Use the report to check whether the tested batch matches the product in your hand. If the bottle has a lot number, that number should correspond to the report. A generic COA, a report for a different product, or a result with no batch identifier tells you less than a batch-matched report.

Look Beyond the THC Result

- **Potency:** Does the measured CBD amount align with the label claim? Check whether results are reported per gram, per serving, or per capsule.
- **THC and other cannabinoids:** Does the report show which THC forms were tested, and are they listed as detected or not detected? Check for stated reporting limits.
- **Contaminants:** Look for relevant testing for pesticides, heavy metals, residual solvents, and microbial contamination.
- **Laboratory details:** Is the lab identified, and does the report include methods and results rather than only a pass/fail badge?

Some brands provide a QR code that leads to a batch report. Tools such as **Batch lab reports** can make it easier to find and compare lot-specific results, but a portal or QR code is only useful if it leads to readable data for the

bottle's actual batch. If results are unclear, ask the company for the full report and the test's detection limits.

What Does “25 mg CBD Capsule” Mean?

A **25 mg CBD capsule** generally claims to provide 25 milligrams of CBD per capsule—not 25 milligrams of total hemp extract. Confirm the wording on the Supplement Facts panel, because the front label may emphasize “hemp extract” or a total serving amount instead.

Check how many capsules make up one serving and compare the serving size with the product directions. A bottle may contain 25 mg per capsule but suggest taking more than one. Also verify that the COA's potency result is expressed in a way you can compare with the label. If the report measures CBD in the whole batch, you may need the batch size or serving information to understand the per-capsule amount.

CBD products can affect people differently and may interact with medications. Talk with a healthcare professional before using CBD, especially if you take prescription medicines, are pregnant or breastfeeding, or have a health condition. Don't use the number on the label as a personalized dose recommendation.

Vegan Claims and Hidden Animal-Derived Ingredients

In the United States, “vegan” is not a federally defined food-label category with one universal government standard. A company may use the word to describe a product, but the claim alone doesn't show what criteria the company follows or how it verifies ingredients. Look for a clear ingredient list, a transparent sourcing statement, and—if you want independent verification—a credible certification mark.

Certified Vegan is a third-party certification program consumers may encounter on product packaging. A mark can offer an additional signal, but check that the certification applies to the specific product rather than assuming a company-wide claim covers every item. If you don't see a certification, that doesn't automatically mean a product contains animal ingredients; it means you may need more information from the brand.

When checking a CBD capsule, ask about:

- Gelatin in hard capsules or softgels
- The source of glycerin
- Magnesium stearate and other processing aids
- Flavorings, colorants, or coatings
- Shared equipment and cross-contact controls, if relevant to your needs

Brands such as **Joy Organics** may publish product details and testing information that shoppers can use as a starting point. Treat brand materials as the beginning of your review, not a substitute for checking the exact product label, shell composition, and matching COA. Editorial coverage, including articles from **Athleisure Mag**, can also introduce products, but a feature or review is not itself a laboratory verification or vegan certification.

USDA Organic Rules and Percentages

“Organic” and “vegan” answer different questions. Organic certification concerns how eligible agricultural ingredients are produced and handled under USDA rules; it does not mean a product is vegan, THC-free, or independently proven to contain the CBD amount on its label.

For packaged products, USDA organic labeling categories generally depend on the percentage of organic ingredients by weight or fluid volume, excluding water and salt. A product labeled “organic” typically must contain

at least 95% organically produced ingredients and meet applicable certification requirements. “Made with organic” can generally be used when at least 70% of the ingredients are organic, with restrictions on how the USDA seal may be used. Products with less than 70% organic ingredients generally may identify specific organic ingredients in the ingredient statement but cannot make the same overall organic claim.

Ask what portion of the finished capsule is covered by an organic claim and which ingredients are certified. Don’t assume that an “organic hemp” statement applies to the capsule shell, carrier oil, or every other ingredient. A USDA Organic seal has specific rules; a general “organic ingredients” phrase may communicate something narrower.

A Practical Label-Checking Checklist

1. **Identify the shell:** Look for gelatin, HPMC, pullulan, or another named material. For a softgel, confirm whether the shell is plant-based.
2. **Read the complete ingredient list:** Check the carrier, flavorings, colorants, and potential animal-derived ingredients—not just the front label.
3. **Clarify broad-spectrum:** Find out which cannabinoids are present and how the brand defines the term.
4. **Inspect THC-free evidence:** Find a current, batch-matched COA and check the THC results and reporting limits.
5. **Verify the CBD amount:** Confirm whether the 25 mg claim is per capsule or per serving and compare it with the lab report.
6. **Evaluate certifications separately:** Vegan certification and USDA Organic status address different standards. Neither proves the other.
7. **Contact the brand when needed:** Ask for shell and glycerin sources, “natural flavors” details, and the testing scope. Keep the response if the distinction matters to you.

Label phrase	What it generally indicates	What to verify
Broad-spectrum CBD	CBD with some other hemp compounds; THC is intended to be removed	Actual cannabinoid profile on the batch COA
THC-free	No THC detected or intended, depending on the brand’s definition and test	Test method, reporting limits, and matching batch
Vegan	A company’s claim that the product avoids animal-derived ingredients	Shell material, ingredient sources, and any applicable certification
Organic	A claim governed by USDA organic rules when properly certified	Percentage category, eligible ingredients, and certification scope

The Bottom Line

“THC-free broad-spectrum CBD” describes an intended extract profile, not a complete guarantee about the finished capsule. Start with the shell, read every ingredient, and check whether vegan or organic claims are supported in the way you expect. Then match the bottle’s lot number to a Certificate of Analysis (COA) and review the cannabinoid results, potency, and testing limits.

That extra label-reading takes a few minutes, but it can answer the questions that matter most: what you’re swallowing, how much CBD the capsule contains, and how much confidence to place in its THC-free claim.

