

GMOs in Wellness Products FAQs

What are GMOs?

GMOs are organisms whose genetic material has been altered using biotechnology in ways that don't occur in nature. GMOs can be commodity crops such as corn, soy and canola, with foreign DNA added to make them herbicide tolerant or make them produce their own insecticide. New GMOs made from emerging techniques are now entering the market at an alarming rate. These organisms generally face fewer regulatory hurdles, but they are still GMOs.

Where do GMOs show up in wellness products?

Genetically modified corn, soy and canola can be processed into a variety of ingredients, including oils for soaps and moisturizers, alcohol or citric acid. Also, microorganisms such as yeast or algae can be genetically modified to produce vitamins, fragrances, resveratrol and non-animal-derived collagen, squalene or spider silk. Functional ingredients such as humectants and surfactants can also be GMOs.

What kind of buzzwords or marketing terms should I be aware of to avoid GMOs?

Some terms that are used to describe GMO techniques or ingredients include bioengineered, bioidentical, precision fermentation, engineered yeast and non-transgenic.

Are synbio ingredients better for the planet than naturally-sourced ingredients?

Many ingredients are available from natural sources, but it's always a good idea to look for ethically and sustainably-sourced products. For example, squalene is a popular ingredient in skin care products. It is naturally-occurring in shark liver, and synbio squalene is growing in popularity. However, squalene is also found in olives. We'd like to see plant-based sources explored before brands go looking for novel, genetically engineered compounds. Synthetic biology uses simple sugars such as corn or soy as food for the genetically modified microorganisms, and large areas of corn or soy monocrops can decimate biodiversity and increase pesticide use.

