

Walgreens links its rewards program with Apple Pay

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Move over, plastic. Mobile payments just got a huge push with a partnership between Walgreens and Apple.

The two companies announced Thursday that Walgreens Balance Rewards members can use their Apple Pay account to buy merchandise without scanning their rewards card at checkout. Apple Pay is a mobile payment service that lets customers buy goods with an iPhone or Apple Watch.

Walgreens, based in suburban Chicago and the nation's largest drugstore chain by number of locations, is the first U.S. retailer to link its loyalty program to Apple Pay. The companies said Balance Rewards members will be able to earn and redeem loyalty points or use discount coupons through Apple Pay.

Previously, Walgreens Balance Rewards members had to scan their loyalty card or give their phone number before making a purchase with Apple Pay. Now they can use the rewards program at checkout by holding their iPhone near a contactless reader with a finger on the Touch ID, the companies said.

On an Apple Watch, they can double-click the side button and select their Balance Rewards card, and hold the watch face up to the reader.

Users will have to add the Balance Rewards digital card to the Wallet app in iOS9 and use it at checkout with Apple Pay, Walgreens said.

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