

Giant Eagle offers free diabetes drugs, advice

BY JANET H. CHO
THE CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER

Giant Eagle is providing five commonly prescribed generic diabetes drugs for free at its pharmacies in Northeast Ohio.

Starting today, customers with valid prescriptions and a Giant Eagle Advantage Card can get 30- to 90-day supplies of the Type 2 diabetes drugs. Ninety percent of diabetics have Type 2 diabetes, in which their bodies have trouble controlling their insulin and blood sugar levels.

More than 300,000 people in Greater Cleveland have been diagnosed with diabetes, and many take multiple medications to manage the disease and related medical complications, said Jill Pupa, executive director of the Northeast Ohio market of the American Diabetes Association.

The Pittsburgh grocer, which launched the program in April at its pharmacies in Toledo and Columbus, isn't the first supermarket in the nation to offer free diabetes medications, but its program may be among the most extensive.

Giant Eagle is the first to offer free diabetes drugs in Northeast Ohio.

Grocers are offering free diabetes drugs as a way to bring people into stores where they will buy other things, from diabetes supplies to groceries.

"Typically, what retailers will do is build

this program around their loyalty cards, use the pharmacy as a destination, but offer tours into the food areas of the store with a dietitian" who might teach customers what to buy and how foods affect their medications, said Bob Vosburgh, group editor for Supermarket News, a trade magazine in New York City.

Randy Heiser, Giant Eagle's vice president of pharmacy operations, said this program builds on the company's other wellness programs, including free antibiotics, flu shots, \$4 and \$10 generic drugs and in-store FastCare clinics.

Pharmacists have been trained to answer more questions about diabetes care.

The supermarket chain wants your Giant Eagle Advantage Card number to track your other prescriptions, tell you when items you've bought have been recalled, and send you information on other programs tailored to your medical condition, said spokesman Rob Borella.

For example, Giant Eagle will offer customers free glucose and hemoglobin screenings, as well as one free nutrition counseling class.

Additional nutrition classes will be offered for a fee. He said the company does not share or sell individually identifiable data about its customers.