

# New Scientist

## Alzheimer's progress slowed by plaque-busting drug

25 March 2015 by [Andy Coghlan](#)

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AT LAST, a ray of hope for people with Alzheimer's disease. In a field where almost all clinical trials of new drugs fail, a drug called aducanumab appears to be bucking the trend.

In a small trial, the drug slowed the progression of the disease and reduced deposits of [amyloid plaques, the substances blamed for damaging the brains of people with Alzheimer's](#).

This is the first time a drug has had a statistically significant effect on both cognition and amyloid in people with mild disease, says Alfred Sandrock at [Biogen](#), the firm that developed aducanumab, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The drug, an antibody discovered by screening blood from healthy older people and people whose Alzheimer's is stable, targets and clears amyloid proteins from the brain.

Of the 166 people in the trial, 54 received a placebo, with the rest divided into groups receiving different doses of the drug once every four weeks. Scans showed that there was virtually no change in the amount of plaque in the placebo recipients' brains. For people taking the antibody, the higher the dosage, the more plaque was cleared.

Likewise, patients' memory loss, judgement and other symptoms of cognitive decline deteriorated slower the more drug they received. "The cognitive benefits are unusually robust for a study of this size and duration," says Eric Karran of [Alzheimer's Research UK](#).

But Karran warns the results should be treated with caution: several participants pulled out because of side effects or lack of perceived benefit, skewing the results towards success. Plus, other [drugs that initially looked promising have gone on to fail in later trials](#) 🚫, he says.

The firm, which presented its results at [an Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease conference](#) in Nice, France, says that it now plans to carry out a much larger trial.

*This article appeared in print under the headline "Antibody slows Alzheimer's mental decline"*