Regarded as a disease of aging, Alzheimer’s affects millions of people around the world and costs billions of dollars to treat. Yet the cause of the disease remains a mystery.

Now, researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles, have identified a biological marker for Alzheimer’s that appears to be a good predictor of the disease. The discovery could pave the way for a breakthrough in the diagnosis and treatment of Alzheimer’s.

The researchers found that people who develop Alzheimer’s are more likely to have a specific protein in their blood than people who do not develop the disease. The protein, called Aβ-42, is a byproduct of a normal brain function. When it accumulates in the brain, it can cause damage to neurons.

The discovery could have important implications for the diagnosis and treatment of Alzheimer’s. If the protein can be detected in a person’s blood, it could be used to predict whether the person is at risk of developing Alzheimer’s. This could help doctors to start treatment early in the disease process, when it is more effective.

The researchers are now working on a test that can detect the protein in blood samples. They hope to have a test available within the next few years.

Alzheimer’s is a complex disease, and the biomarker is likely to be just one piece of the puzzle. But the discovery is an important step forward in understanding the disease and finding a cure.