

McGill University Desautels Faculty of Management



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MGSC 661 Multivariate Statistical Analysis

Final Report:

Predicting Alzheimer's Disease in Hospital Patients Using Machine Learning

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1. Introduction and Business Context

Alzheimer's disease (AD) stands as the most prevalent neurodegenerative disorder and the primary cause of dementia, characterised by a progressive decline in memory, cognitive function, and the ability to perform daily tasks (Arjaria et al., 2024; L. Wang et al., 2021). However, the disease remains incurable, making early detection critical for effective disease management (Antor et al., 2021; Rani et al., 2024). Conventional diagnostic techniques often rely heavily on complex clinical judgments, neuroimaging, and neuropsychological assessments, which can be time-consuming, expensive, and subject to variability in predictive accuracy (Kavitha et al., 2022; X. Wang et al., 2024).

To address these diagnostic challenges, machine learning (ML) and data science approaches have emerged as powerful tools for developing automated and objective risk prediction models (Ezzati et al., 2019). Previous studies have demonstrated the efficacy of algorithms such as Support Vector Machines (SVM), Random Forests, and Logistic Regression in distinguishing between cognitively normal individuals and those with AD using demographic, clinical, and neuroimaging data (Neelaveni & Devasana, 2020; Antor et al., 2021). Building on this body of research, this project aims to construct a predictive model designed to diagnose Alzheimer's disease.

2. Methodology

2.1. Dataset

Our dataset was found on Kaggle and provides comprehensive information on over 2,000 hospital patients. Each row represents a unique patient. The features can be split into six main categories: demographics, lifestyle factors, medical history, clinical measurements, cognitive and functional assessments, and symptoms. The target variable was binary where one indicated a diagnosis of AD and zero not diagnosed with AD. The dataset is very clean and detailed likely owing to its synthetic nature. While we could not find further information on how the dataset was generated, one possibility is that the data is real but anonymized and altered using a deep learning model. All the data is numerical or, if categorical, encoded already. In addition, there is no missing values meaning the dataset is almost ready for modelling.

2.2. Exploratory Data Analysis

The distributions of the features were explored to gain a richer understanding of the dataset (see Appendix). The age range is between 60 and 90, there is an even gender split and the majority of the patients are Caucasian indicating this dataset is likely based off a Western country. Next, we explored the distribution of the target variable (see Appendix). It is slightly imbalanced, with 35% of the patients having a positive diagnosis. The imbalance is not so extreme as to require adjusting the data and/or model, but it is also not representative of real patients. We expect that in real hospitals the diagnosis rate (even among older patients) to be much lower and thus slightly unrealistic in our data.

Finally, from our progress report, we discovered that only a few variables have an absolute (linear) correlation with the target variable above 0.1 (see Appendix). We examined the distribution of these important variables to gain a better understanding of their meaning (see Appendix). Functional assessment and Activity of Daily Living (ADL) were both uniformly distributed from 0 to 10 where a lower score indicated a worse result for the patient. Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE) was similarly uniformly distributed where a lower score indicates a worse patient life but scaled from 0 to 30. Memory complaints and behavioural problems are both binary variables where 1 indicates complaints/problems, and they occurred in roughly one fifth of all patients.

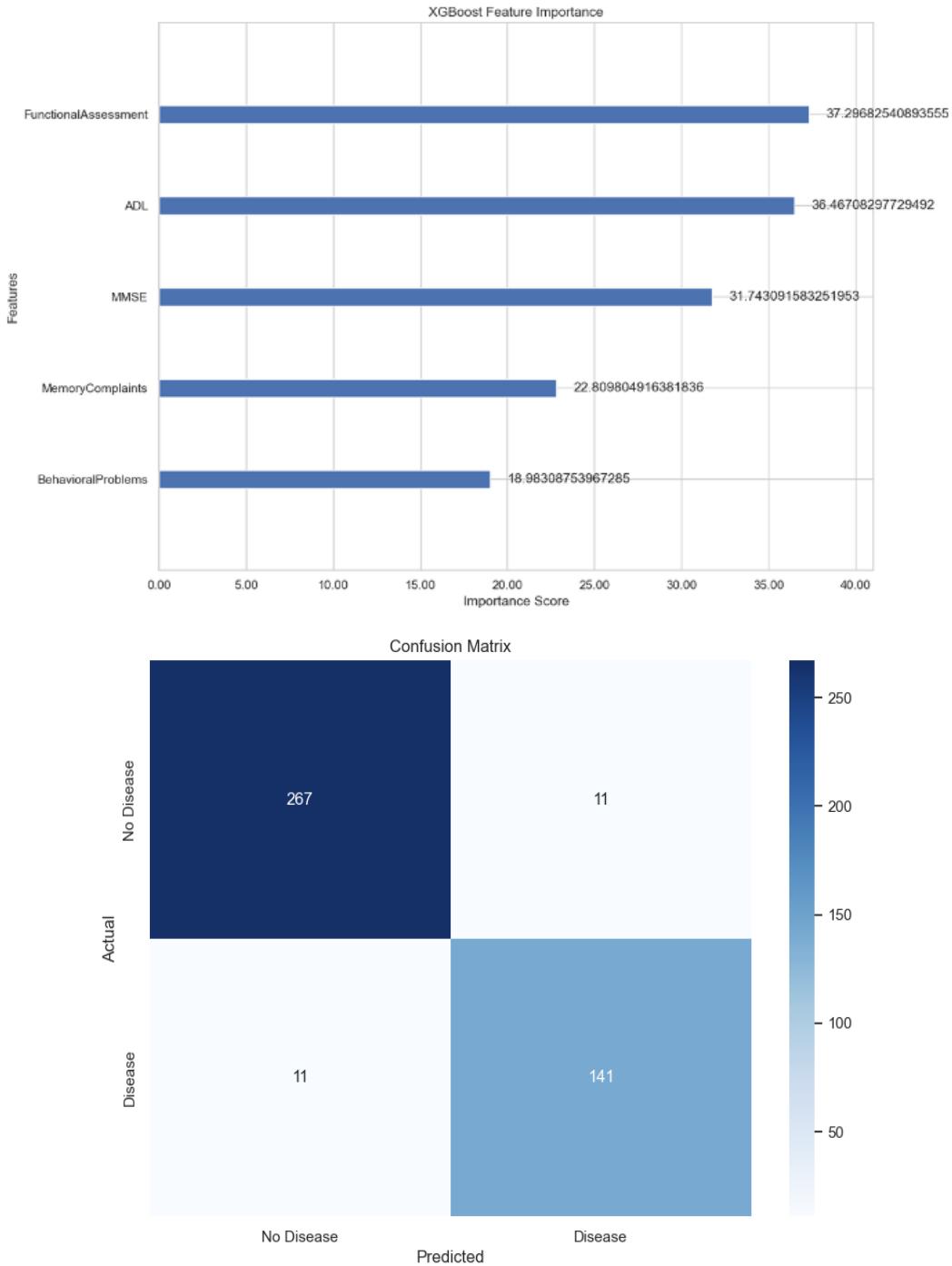
3. Analysis and Results

3.1. XGBoost

XGBoost (Extreme Gradient Boosting) is a high-performance machine learning algorithm based on gradient boosted decision trees. This model was selected for the AD prediction task because it outperforms linear models in capturing the complex and non-linear relationships inherent in cognitive and behavioral assessments. It also handles interaction effects that are present in AD indicators, for example, functional with cognitive decline, while reducing the risk of overfitting, which is crucial with medical data where noise and variability are common.

We used XGBoost's feature importance scores to determine which variables contribute most strongly to classification. Top drivers include Functional Assessment, showing that reduced functional ability is highly indicative of AD. Activities of Daily Living (ADL) declines and low scores signal early impairment and correlate strongly with disease beginning. MMSE (Cognitive Performance) plays a major role but is slightly less influential than physical/functional metrics. Report of memory complaints and presence of behavioural problems are important predictors too. These insights show that functional capability and daily living performance are more predictive of AD than subjective memory concerns alone. This aligns with clinical patterns where functional decline often precedes or accompanies cognitive deterioration. The feature importance is shown below.

To evaluate the model's predictive ability, we examined the confusion matrix. The model correctly classifies 95% of all patients. Among patients predicted to have AD, 93% truly have the disease (high precision). The model successfully identifies 93% of all AD cases, missing only 7% (high recall). These results confirm that the model not only performs well overall but also maintains strong performance for both identifying AD and avoiding false alarms.



3.2. Logistic Regression

We developed a Logistic Regression baseline model for the features that showed importance in the XGBoost model, i.e., the results of cognitive and functional assessments. These predictors have a significance level $p < 0.001$, supporting the interpretation that these are the most reliable indicators of AD presence in a patient, as shown in the following table.

Variable	Coefficient	P> z	[0.025]	[0.975]
Intercept	3.8610	0.000	3.407	4.315
MMSE	-0.1072	0.000	-0.123	-0.091
FunctionalAssessment	-0.4441	0.000	-0.495	-0.393
MemoryComplaints	2.5896	0.000	2.266	2.913
BehavioralProblems	2.4733	0.000	2.119	2.828
ADL	-0.4139	0.000	-0.464	-0.364

The baseline model demonstrated good discriminative ability with an area under the curve (AUC) of 0.907. The following table presents the key results of the baseline model:

Metric	Value	Interpretation
Accuracy	0.846	Model correctly classifies 84.5% of the patients based on their cognitive and functional assessments.
Precision	0.806	Of all the patients predicted to have AD, 74% actually have it.
Recall	0.743	Model identifies 80.5% of actual AD cases.
Specificity	0.902	The proportion of actual negative cases that are correctly predicted as negative.
ROC-AUC	0.907	In 90.7% of randomly paired cases, the model correctly assigns a higher probability of diagnosis to the positive case.

Although the accuracy of this model is lower than the accuracy of the XGBoost, it is more interpretable. Therefore, we can use it to make inferences and test the hypotheses we outlined for this research.

Based on the literature, we expected positive coefficients for both Age and Family History, indicating higher log-odds of AD, and a negative coefficient for Education. Furthermore, we hypothesize a negative coefficient for the interaction term Age × Education, suggesting that as education levels rise, the effect of age on the probability of developing AD decreases. Contrary to our hypothesis, neither age nor family history of AD showed significant associations with AD diagnosis. Education level and the age × education interaction term are non-significant, providing no evidence for educational moderation of age-related AD risk.

The second hypothesis is that lower MMSE scores and worse functional status are strongly associated with higher odds of Alzheimer's. Similarly, hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, higher LDL and triglycerides, and lower HDL are associated with higher odds of Alzheimer's, independent of age and sex. As seen in the baseline and XGBoost models, cognitive and functional measures showed strong

associations with AD diagnosis. The MMSE score demonstrated a strong negative effect, as did functional assessment scores and ADL scores. Memory complaints and behavioral problems were positively associated with AD diagnosis. In contrast, vascular risk factors showed no significant associations, as determined by their p-values shown in the table below.

Finally, we evaluate the impact of lifestyle factors and demographic interactions. We hypothesize that adverse behaviors, such as physical inactivity, poor diet, sleep disturbances, depression, and substance use, are associated with increased log-odds of AD. The model also tests the Age \times Gender interaction to assess if the age-related risk is steeper for women, and the Ethnicity variable to determine if diagnostic probabilities differ across groups when holding cognitive deterioration constant. None of these factors reached statistical significance, also summarized in the table below. This suggests that there is no evidence to support these hypotheses.

Our analysis reveals a disconnect between established AD risk factors and diagnostic predictors. Traditional risk factors, such as age, family history, lifestyle, likely influence whether someone develops AD over their lifetime. However, once cognitive decline is measurable, these historical factors become diagnostically irrelevant, and the current functional status becomes more determining. The results are summarized in the following table.

Hypothesis	Feature	Coefficient	P-Value
H1: Demographics & Education	Age	-0.0205	0.0897
H1: Demographics & Education	FamilyHistoryAlzheimers	-0.0751	0.6054
H1: Demographics & Education	EducationLevel	-0.6790	0.2463
H1: Demographics & Education	Age:EducationLevel	0.0078	0.3121
H2: Clinical Indicators	Hypertension	0.1844	0.2921
H2: Clinical Indicators	Diabetes	0.0256	0.8877
H2: Clinical Indicators	CardiovascularDisease	0.1528	0.3799
H2: Clinical Indicators	CholesterolLDL	-0.0031	0.0354
H2: Clinical Indicators	CholesterolTriglycerides	0.0008	0.2089
H2: Clinical Indicators	CholesterolHDL	0.0046	0.0942
H3: Lifestyle & Behavioral	PhysicalActivity	-0.0051	0.8133
H3: Lifestyle & Behavioral	DietQuality	0.0122	0.5761
H3: Lifestyle & Behavioral	SleepQuality	-0.0541	0.1297
H3: Lifestyle & Behavioral	Depression	0.0547	0.7235
H3: Lifestyle & Behavioral	AlcoholConsumption	-0.0077	0.4780
H3: Lifestyle & Behavioral	Smoking	-0.2105	0.1313

H4: Age-Gender Interaction	Age	-0.0147	0.1312
H4: Age-Gender Interaction	Gender	-0.7368	0.4863
H4: Age-Gender Interaction	Age:Gender	0.0091	0.5170
H5: Ethnicity	Ethnicity	-0.0447	0.4866

4. Discussion and Recommendations

Our analysis highlights that although age, lifestyle habits and vascular conditions are widely cited in academic literature as long-term contributors to Alzheimer's development, these factors become diagnostically irrelevant when functional deterioration is measurable. Neither demographic attributes nor medical history variables were statistically significant in predicting diagnosis, suggesting that screening patients based on background characteristics does not meaningfully support clinical decision making once symptoms emerge.

Instead, diagnosis relies mainly on current functional and cognitive performance, with MMSE, Functional Assessment, ADL scores and patient-reported memory and behavioural complaints consistently ranking as the strongest predictors across both logistic regression and XGBoost models. This indicates that Alzheimer's should not be approached as a demographic risk-profiling exercise but rather, as a functional impairment evaluation. Therefore, hospitals should shift resources toward strengthening structured cognitive and functional assessment protocols, integrating patient-reported symptoms into intake procedure and also, reducing reliance on demographic or lifestyle screening variables that do not improve diagnostic accuracy. In practice, this means prioritising tools and workflows that measure present cognitive status rather than attempting to infer diagnosis from historical exposure or risk, as doing so is both more predictive and clinically meaningful.

5. Conclusion

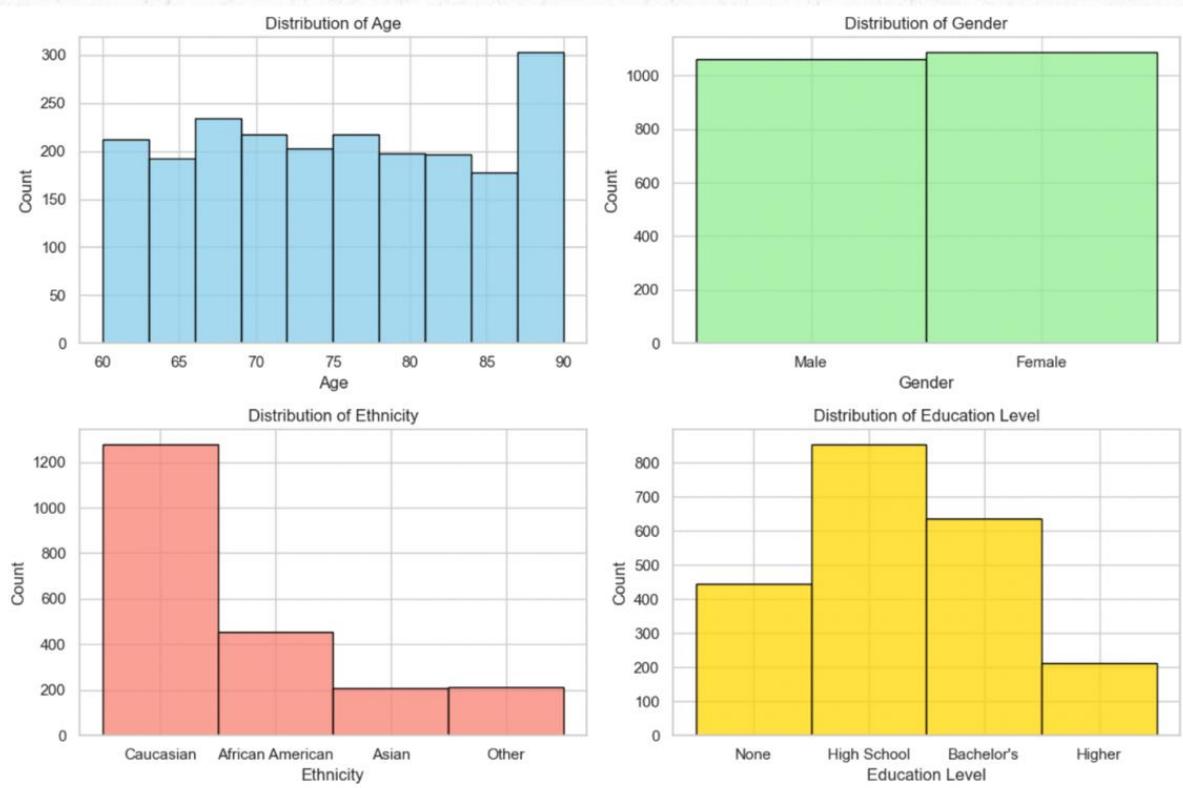
Our finding strongly supports prioritising functional and cognitive assessment in Alzheimer's disease diagnosis. MMSE, Functional Assessment and ADL scores consistently emerged as the most influential predictors, which indicates that present cognitive performance rather than demographic or historical risk factors drives diagnostic accuracy. The continued significance of subjective indicators such as memory complaints and behavioural problems further highlights that patient-reported symptoms provide meaningful diagnostic value when combined with objective testing. Overall, these results suggests that Alzheimer's detection should focus less on profiling long-term risks and more on evaluating current cognitive impairment. While future work using real clinical data is needed to confirm the generalizability of our findings, the evidence clearly points toward functional decline, and not background characteristics as the most reliable foundation for Alzheimer's evaluation.

References

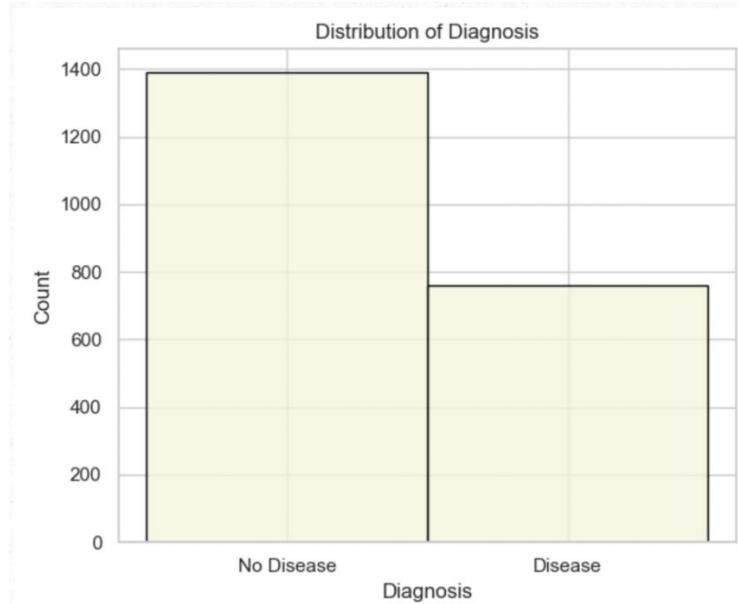
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Appendix

Distribution of Demographic Variables



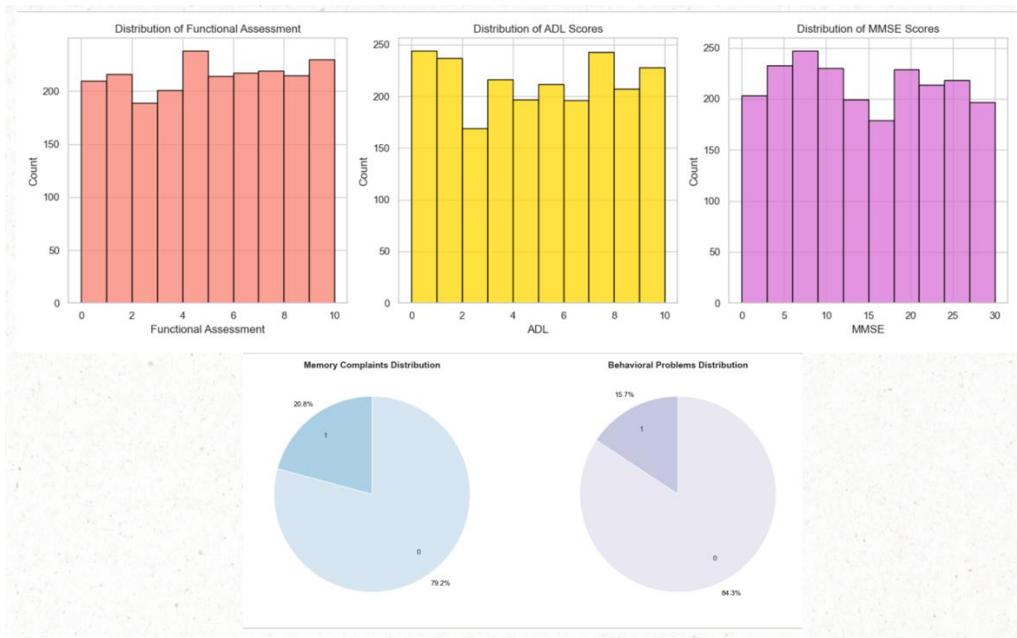
Distribution of Target Variable



Strong Correlation with Target Variable

Diagnosis	
Diagnosis	1.00
MemoryComplaints	0.31
BehavioralProblems	0.22
MMSE	-0.24
ADL	-0.33
FunctionalAssessment	-0.36

Distribution of Key Target Variables



Features Results for Logistic Regression models

Multivariate Analysis (All Features)			
	Coefficient	P-Value	
Feature			
intercept	5.2976	0.0000	
MemoryComplaints	2.5967	0.0000	
BehavioralProblems	2.5053	0.0000	
ADL	-0.4216	0.0000	
FunctionalAssessment	-0.4482	0.0000	
MMSE	-0.1071	0.0000	
CholesterolLDL	-0.0029	0.0501	
CholesterolHDL	0.0047	0.0857	
SleepQuality	-0.0554	0.1270	
Smoking	-0.2138	0.1316	
HeadInjury	-0.3272	0.1411	
Age	-0.0103	0.1429	
EducationLevel	-0.0880	0.2144	
CholesterolTriglycerides	0.0007	0.2401	
Hypertension	0.1979	0.2650	
Confusion	-0.1542	0.3337	
CardiovascularDisease	0.1676	0.3412	
AlcoholConsumption	-0.0087	0.4283	
FamilyHistoryAlzheimers	-0.1106	0.4563	
Disorientation	-0.1206	0.4923	
DifficultyCompletingTasks	0.1008	0.5625	
Ethnicity	-0.0374	0.5650	
DiastolicBP	0.0019	0.6047	
BMI	-0.0044	0.6221	
DietQuality	0.0100	0.6513	
Depression	0.0661	0.6721	
PersonalityChanges	-0.0711	0.6965	
Gender	-0.0479	0.7074	
PhysicalActivity	-0.0073	0.7399	
SystolicBP	-0.0007	0.7726	
CholesterolTotal	0.0002	0.8745	
Diabetes	0.0153	0.9331	
Forgetfulness	0.0036	0.9795	

Demographics Analysis			
	Coefficient	P-Value	
Feature			
intercept	-0.2814	0.4716	
Age	-0.0017	0.7379	
Gender	-0.0886	0.3272	
Ethnicity	-0.0286	0.5313	
EducationLevel	-0.1027	0.0410	

Lifestyle Analysis			
	Coefficient	P-Value	
Feature			
intercept	-0.3607	0.2067	
BMI	0.0075	0.2309	
Smoking	-0.0251	0.8020	
AlcoholConsumption	-0.0029	0.7117	
PhysicalActivity	0.0044	0.7829	

DietQuality	0.0079	0.6104
SleepQuality	-0.0677	0.0084

Medical History Analysis
Coefficient P-Value

Feature		
intercept	-0.5697	0.0000
FamilyHistoryAlzheimers	-0.1723	0.1027
CardiovascularDisease	0.1906	0.1322
Diabetes	-0.1915	0.1382
Depression	-0.0382	0.7359
HeadInjury	-0.1606	0.3137
Hypertension	0.2071	0.0971

Clinical Measurements Analysis
Coefficient P-Value

Feature		
intercept	-0.7002	0.1235
SystolicBP	-0.0012	0.4774
DiastolicBP	0.0005	0.8317
CholesterolTotal	0.0003	0.7596
CholesterolLDL	-0.0015	0.1579
CholesterolHDL	0.0037	0.0570
CholesterolTriglycerides	0.0004	0.3200

Cognitive & Functional Analysis
Coefficient P-Value

Feature		
intercept	3.8610	0.0
MMSE	-0.1072	0.0
FunctionalAssessment	-0.4441	0.0
MemoryComplaints	2.5896	0.0
BehavioralProblems	2.4733	0.0
ADL	-0.4139	0.0

Symptoms Analysis
Coefficient P-Value

Feature		
intercept	-0.5482	0.0000
Confusion	-0.0986	0.3825
Disorientation	-0.1447	0.2500
PersonalityChanges	-0.1278	0.3182
DifficultyCompletingTasks	0.0511	0.6782
Forgetfulness	-0.0052	0.9578

===== H1: Baseline + Age/Edu Interaction =====
Generalized Linear Model Regression Results

Dep. Variable:	Diagnosis	No. Observations:	2149
Model:	GLM	Df Residuals:	2139
Model Family:	Binomial	Df Model:	9
Link Function:	Logit	Scale:	1.0000
Method:	IRLS	Log-Likelihood:	-801.41

Date: Tue, 02 Dec 2025 Deviance: 1602.8
 Time: 21:16:27 Pearson chi2: 5.22e+03
 No. Iterations: 6 Pseudo R-squ. (CS): 0.4251
 Covariance Type: nonrobust

	coef	std err	z	P> z	[0.025	0.975]
intercept	5.5366	0.950	5.830	0.000	3.675	7.398
MMSE	-0.1068	0.008	-13.192	0.000	-0.123	-0.091
FunctionalAssessment	-0.4435	0.026	-17.052	0.000	-0.494	-0.393
MemoryComplaints	2.6013	0.166	15.712	0.000	2.277	2.926
BehavioralProblems	2.4942	0.182	13.738	0.000	2.138	2.850
ADL	-0.4149	0.026	-16.172	0.000	-0.465	-0.365
Age	-0.0205	0.012	-1.697	0.090	-0.044	0.003
FamilyHistoryAlzheimers	-0.0751	0.145	-0.517	0.605	-0.360	0.210
EducationLevel	-0.6790	0.586	-1.159	0.246	-1.827	0.469
Age:EducationLevel	0.0078	0.008	1.011	0.312	-0.007	0.023

===== H2: Baseline + Clinical Indicators =====

Generalized Linear Model Regression Results

Dep. Variable: Diagnosis No. Observations: 2149
 Model: GLM Df Residuals: 2135
 Model Family: Binomial Df Model: 13
 Link Function: Logit Scale: 1.0000
 Method: IRLS Log-Likelihood: -797.37
 Date: Tue, 02 Dec 2025 Deviance: 1594.7
 Time: 21:16:28 Pearson chi2: 5.92e+03
 No. Iterations: 6 Pseudo R-squ. (CS): 0.4272
 Covariance Type: nonrobust

	coef	std err	z	P> z	[0.025	0.975]
intercept	4.5301	0.650	6.972	0.000	3.257	5.803
MMSE	-0.1074	0.008	-13.218	0.000	-0.123	-0.091
FunctionalAssessment	-0.4449	0.026	-16.988	0.000	-0.496	-0.394
MemoryComplaints	2.5974	0.166	15.674	0.000	2.273	2.922
BehavioralProblems	2.4929	0.182	13.670	0.000	2.135	2.850
ADL	-0.4187	0.026	-16.245	0.000	-0.469	-0.368
Hypertension	0.1844	0.175	1.053	0.292	-0.159	0.527
Diabetes	0.0256	0.181	0.141	0.888	-0.330	0.381
CardiovascularDisease	0.1528	0.174	0.878	0.380	-0.188	0.494
CholesterolLDL	-0.0031	0.001	-2.104	0.035	-0.006	-0.000
CholesterolTriglycerides	0.0008	0.001	1.256	0.209	-0.000	0.002
CholesterolHDL	0.0046	0.003	1.674	0.094	-0.001	0.010
Age	-0.0099	0.007	-1.416	0.157	-0.024	0.004
Gender	-0.0561	0.126	-0.445	0.656	-0.303	0.191

===== H3: Baseline + Lifestyle =====

Generalized Linear Model Regression Results

Dep. Variable: Diagnosis No. Observations: 2149
 Model: GLM Df Residuals: 2136
 Model Family: Binomial Df Model: 12
 Link Function: Logit Scale: 1.0000
 Method: IRLS Log-Likelihood: -801.01
 Date: Tue, 02 Dec 2025 Deviance: 1602.0
 Time: 21:16:28 Pearson chi2: 4.69e+03

No. Iterations:	6	Pseudo R-squ. (CS):	0.4253			
Covariance Type:	nonrobust					
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	coef	std err	z	P> z	[0.025	0.975]
intercept	4.4409	0.462	9.615	0.000	3.536	5.346
MMSE	-0.1074	0.008	-13.278	0.000	-0.123	-0.092
FunctionalAssessment	-0.4457	0.026	-17.078	0.000	-0.497	-0.395
MemoryComplaints	2.5928	0.166	15.663	0.000	2.268	2.917
BehavioralProblems	2.4712	0.182	13.610	0.000	2.115	2.827
ADL	-0.4151	0.026	-16.219	0.000	-0.465	-0.365
PhysicalActivity	-0.0051	0.022	-0.236	0.813	-0.048	0.037
DietQuality	0.0122	0.022	0.559	0.576	-0.031	0.055
SleepQuality	-0.0541	0.036	-1.515	0.130	-0.124	0.016
Depression	0.0547	0.155	0.354	0.723	-0.248	0.358
AlcoholConsumption	-0.0077	0.011	-0.710	0.478	-0.029	0.014
Smoking	-0.2105	0.140	-1.509	0.131	-0.484	0.063
BMI	-0.0035	0.009	-0.398	0.690	-0.021	0.014
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H4: Baseline + Age-Gender Interaction

Generalized Linear Model Regression Results

Dep. Variable:	Diagnosis	No. Observations:	2149			
Model:	GLM	Df Residuals:	2133			
Model Family:	Binomial	Df Model:	15			
Link Function:	Logit	Scale:	1.0000			
Method:	IRLS	Log-Likelihood:	-796.45			
Date:	Tue, 02 Dec 2025	Deviance:	1592.9			
Time:	21:16:28	Pearson chi2:	6.16e+03			
No. Iterations:	6	Pseudo R-squ. (CS):	0.4277			
Covariance Type:	nonrobust					
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	coef	std err	z	P> z	[0.025	0.975]
intercept	4.9877	0.837	5.957	0.000	3.347	6.629
MMSE	-0.1072	0.008	-13.185	0.000	-0.123	-0.091
FunctionalAssessment	-0.4450	0.026	-16.965	0.000	-0.496	-0.394
MemoryComplaints	2.6010	0.166	15.681	0.000	2.276	2.926
BehavioralProblems	2.5036	0.183	13.688	0.000	2.145	2.862
ADL	-0.4191	0.026	-16.233	0.000	-0.470	-0.368
Age	-0.0147	0.010	-1.509	0.131	-0.034	0.004
Gender	-0.7368	1.058	-0.696	0.486	-2.811	1.337
Age:Gender	0.0091	0.014	0.648	0.517	-0.018	0.036
EducationLevel	-0.0846	0.070	-1.210	0.226	-0.222	0.052
Hypertension	0.1804	0.175	1.030	0.303	-0.163	0.524
Diabetes	0.0230	0.182	0.126	0.899	-0.333	0.379
CardiovascularDisease	0.1612	0.174	0.925	0.355	-0.180	0.503
CholesterolLDL	-0.0030	0.001	-2.054	0.040	-0.006	-0.000
CholesterolTriglycerides	0.0008	0.001	1.237	0.216	-0.000	0.002
CholesterolHDL	0.0046	0.003	1.692	0.091	-0.001	0.010
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===== H5: Baseline + Ethnicity =====

Generalized Linear Model Regression Results

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Dep. Variable: Diagnosis No. Observations: 2149
Model: GLM Df Residuals: 2142
Model Family: Binomial Df Model: 6
Link Function: Logit Scale: 1.0000
Method: IRLS Log-Likelihood: -803.75
Date: Tue, 02 Dec 2025 Deviance: 1607.5
Time: 21:16:28 Pearson chi2: 5.04e+03
No. Iterations: 6 Pseudo R-squ. (CS): 0.4238
Covariance Type: nonrobust

=====

	coef	std err	z	P> z	[0.025	0.975]
intercept	3.8923	0.236	16.488	0.000	3.430	4.355
MMSE	-0.1072	0.008	-13.283	0.000	-0.123	-0.091
FunctionalAssessment	-0.4443	0.026	-17.097	0.000	-0.495	-0.393
MemoryComplaints	2.5890	0.165	15.711	0.000	2.266	2.912
BehavioralProblems	2.4703	0.181	13.654	0.000	2.116	2.825
ADL	-0.4138	0.026	-16.221	0.000	-0.464	-0.364
Ethnicity	-0.0447	0.064	-0.696	0.487	-0.171	0.081

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