*Table 1. Baseline demographic and clinical characteristics of study participants.*

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Characteristic** | **HC (n=1000)** | **MS (n=381)** | **p-value** |
| **Age (years)ᵃ** | 34.7 ± 10.2 | 37.4 ± 10.2 | 0.001\* |
| **Female sex, n (%)ᵇ** | 673 (67.4%) | 273 (71.7%) | 0.142 |
| **Age by gender (years)ᵃ** | | | |
| Males | 34.8 ± 10.8 | 36.6 ± 10.5 | 0.156 |
| Females | 34.7 ± 9.9 | 37.7 ± 10.2 | 0.004\* |
| **Gender ratio (F:M)** | 2.06:1 | 2.53:1 | 0.142 |
| **Age range (years)** | 18-74 | 18-68 | — |
| **Median age [IQR] (years)ᶜ** | | | |
| All participants | 34 [27-41] | 37  [30-44] | 0.001\* |
| Males | 35 [26-42] | 34.5  [29-45.2] | 0.156 |
| Females | 34 [27-41] | 37  [30-44] | 0.004\* |

*ᵃ Mean ± standard deviation. ᵇ Number (percentage). ᶜ Median [interquartile range]. \*p < 0.05 considered statistically significant. p-values calculated using independent t-tests for continuous variables and χ² test for categorical variables (gender distribution). IQR = interquartile range; F:M = female to male ratio.*