

# Cogmed Working Memory Training: Trainee Lists of Pros and Cons

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*The following list was created by combining "pros and cons" lists from trainees who have completed training. All trainees, or their parents, are offered the option of contributing to the list. The list is not edited. All comments submitted are included in the list.*

## **Pros**

1. It works.
2. The explanation of the training, working memory, etc. provided by Tracy was excellent. She was willing to spend the time with me on the phone or by email so that all my questions were answered thoroughly.
3. The Cog Med training web site (where we follow the progress) provided a lot of useful information. Cog Med is also flexible, allowing us to remove certain exercises or decrease the number of trials.
4. Intake process and explanation helps to set up expectations accurately....just what Cogmed can and can't do.
5. Easy to do exercises at home from one's own computer at whatever time of day suits the patient best.
6. Dr. Ware is extremely helpful and great to work with.
7. I am more likely to finish a task once I begin – even though I take a bathroom or lunch break. (It took all day to de-spider, clean furniture, clean pollen and dust off of everything – again – on the big screen porch at the lake. But at the end of the afternoon, it was done!
8. Although I still do motor-mouth, I am better at staying on topic or catching myself when I stray off into the verbal woods.
9. Most of the time I remember where I left my glasses, cell phone and keys. This makes leaving the house a less stressful event. (\*\*\*\* is Mr., prompt-on-the-button....and any last minute run-backs drive him nuts.
10. Charts and graphs which track one's progress visually provide a great incentive to keep going, as do voice-over encouragements prompted by the program as you're doing the exercises and e-mail check ins from the Cogmed provider (Tracy).
11. Some of exercises (like Asteroids) were really fun.
12. The program can be stopped if a child has used up all their "brain energy" and they can take a break and come back later. At the beginning we divided the one session into 3 "mini" sessions a day, this kind of flexibility on the part of the program is WONDERFUL.
13. It is a real plus to be able to do this training at home.

14. It definitely teaches working memory, at the beginning I could keep up with the sequences presented to my son (who is doing the training). I can no longer keep up with the long sequences that my son (who is training) does.
15. I read that some people found it frustrating, but I didn't because when you get one wrong, the next one is easier. It copes with how your brain is doing that day.
16. Improvements in focusing skills were evident in a short period of time.
17. For me, secondary effects started phasing in just after 2 weeks, and they are continuing to phase in. These include, an awareness of a "priority list" and "time placeholder" beginning to form to the right side of my brain. This first appeared in an incomplete way on my day off, when I was more relaxed, but then started appearing more consistently. Now, a week into extended training, it is there almost all the time, except when I'm over-tired.
18. I pack the night before a trip – even meds. I leave only what I will need to take in the morning in the bathroom in a separate container.
19. I have made "to do" lists – but I lose them less frequently.
20. My home office is neater and better organized. I had been working with a professional organizer, but her systems didn't hold up. By trial and error I found that that labeled drawers work better for storing papers, greeting cards etc. And that cosmetics, hair products, and the like are better stored in larger compartments by type (eye stuff, face stuff,) rather than every item in its own tiny container. Also, things I use every day are in a vanity top holder (make-up brushes, tooth paste and floss) so they are right there – with no fumbling. Do things get out of hand sometimes? Of course. But \*\*\* (who works free) or the woman who cleans for us (costs less than organizer and knows my systems) will work with me to throw out or file away.
21. Indeed, I am now able to prepare and serve a simple meal to guests, keep the house less cluttered: when in doubt, throw it out. Want to keep. Put it in a labeled box. Next big plan is to make a list of what's where!
22. Overall, I think the Cogmed training was beneficial. And you were wonderful coaching me through it.
23. Time has appeared to slow down and tasks fall into place. If I don't complete them, there's always tomorrow, and I know I will get to them in order.
24. This I didn't expect, but I am more able to separate my emotions from my everyday activities and events without the effort I needed to expend to do that before. This is huge.
25. I have no doubt I will finish all 100 extended training sessions. I've already seen a 2 point increase after just one or two trainings. It makes no sense NOT to do them.
26. Simple shifts that have been almost "magic": I'm remembering to close the garage door when I come in the house 95% of the time....before Cogmed it was 20%, I'm starting to sometimes "clean up as I go" when I'm cooking or doing some other project. My mother tried to teach me this for 18 years, then my husband tried for over 30....even my adult daughter has tried to get me to "clean up as I go"....to absolutely no avail...sometimes with me ending up in tears. Guess what? After Cogmed, I'm starting to show lots of signs of "cleaning up as I go." Now, that is truly transformational!!
27. Unlike the case with some medication, this brain training improves ADD limitations but does not impact the ADD strengths I have come to rely on. The creativity, ability to think outside

the box, skill in making connections between seemingly unconnected subjects and events are all still there. The thing is, I can choose to think "in the box" if I want to when the situation calls for it. The linear ability Cogmed is developing in me (and I say developing because it is still in process even though I've finished the initial training) has not diminished my substantial right brain abilities at all. It is just giving me a choice I have not had before.

28. Clearly, the cons are minimal in relation to the pros. \*\*\* and several friends have noted definite improvements.
29. Certain linear tasks I've learned to do passably well...but still honestly struggle with even after lots of modification, ADD coaching, self coaching, etc....have now become much easier post-Cogmed. This is another real plus.
30. Having a (terrific) coach helped a lot. The encouragement, the explanations those "bad" sessions weren't really a sign of failure; tips on dealing with incomprehensible exercises (like the rotating light panel) really helped keep me going.
31. The graphics are lively, but some of the voice "encouragements" were rather hokey-sounding, even to my old ears
32. Cogmed tech support was excellent, but available only business hours/weekdays. I think there is only one tech support guy, but he's patient and knows his stuff.
33. The ability to do a couple of sessions a week for almost a year will, I believe, help reinforce the beneficial changes. ("Use it or lose it.")
34. The "take a break" during a run of boo-boos it is an effective reminder to do just that.
35. The musical "intermezzos" are a good idea. But the only one that got me moving in my chair was "Dancing Queen" – perhaps because it was the only melody I recognized. But a little swaying, shoulder movements, foot jiggling helps re-energize and get some oxygen to my brain.

## Cons

1. The exercises seem so simple that it is easy, if you are a rational, educated person, to really doubt if they are worth the money, time or effort. Believe me, even though they are deceptively simple, the Cogmed algorithm really works on shifting your brain...you actually do feel your brain working.
2. The algorithm is designed so that you always get 50% of the questions wrong, more or less, no matter how well you are doing. If you are a competitive achievement oriented person and/or if you have low frustration tolerance, this might be demotivating. Work hard to make it a challenge, though, because it is worth it.
3. We all have habits that have developed over time based on the brain power/working memory we had before Cogmed. For me, that's almost 55 years of repetitively doing things to "get around" my ADD limitations. I think it is important to remember that I just finished six weeks/30 days of Cogmed and that changes I'm observing now will (hopefully) increase dramatically over the next year as I do the extended training but also, more importantly, as I

work with myself on prioritizing a list of habitual behaviors that I want to consciously change because I know that now I have the working memory to change them.

4. It is difficult, sometimes, to observe your own brain....so sometimes I wonder if the changes I'm perceiving are a result of wishful thinking. After all, I've spent considerable time, money, and effort on Cogmed. Also, since these secondary changes are behavioral, they fade in over time....don't tend to appear all of a sudden....so it is easier to doubt them.
5. You must make sure you have an absolute quiet place to do these activities. I ended up asking my family members to stay upstairs...and I wore both headphones and earplugs to eliminate stray noises from the neighbors, appliances, pets, etc. The exercises take real concentration.
6. Sometimes the exercises can be frustrating...especially if you miss a series due to inadvertently hitting the wrong key or you get 90% of the problem but miss only one part of it. The program does adjust for this so it just takes, again, raising one's frustration tolerance.
7. My 12 year old daughter came to "hate" the training exercises. She did not like the repetition or the flashing lights. I think that kids are used to much more interesting computer games, and these are very simple. I was glad I never tried to convince her it would be "fun."
8. It takes faith to believe that such simple exercises will work. It helps to read the research in case the simplicity of the exercises makes you doubtful.
9. When you make this much of a dramatic change, friends and family start to notice, and it is an adjustment for them. Patience and communication will be necessary as you change.
10. Even though I was told the exercises take 30 to 40 minutes, there were times a session took 50+ minutes, so it is important, I think, to try to schedule a whole hour without obligations just to make sure you have time to be relaxed while you are doing the exercises. I found that if I knew that my time was running short due to other obligations, I didn't do as well on the exercises.
11. The progress is not completely linear....it will go up and down kind of like a chart of anything you're trying to accomplish: weight loss or investment performance, for example. The important thing is to remember that you will have days you will jump up significantly and days or weeks of plateaus.....the plateau training, however, seems to prepare you for the next jump.
12. It would help to have an intermediate step between finishing one of the 15 exercises and starting the next one. I have a tendency to hit the "go" button -- subconsciously thinking feeling that it will bring the next part up on the screen but not start it. I have no idea why I do this even though I know it will start lights blinking, etc. and if my attention has wandered, there goes #1.
13. Not really a con, time will tell how this computer learning translates to real life situations.
14. Need for speed on "Monster Whack." Even though I am moving the cursor directly toward the correct hole, the monster pops up and heads back down before I can get there and click the mouse. (This probably has more to do with my lack of coordination than the program. Perhaps there could be an optional "klutz" option to add another second or two for those of us who can't move and click fast enough.) I'm usually right next to the hole when the monster retreats.

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