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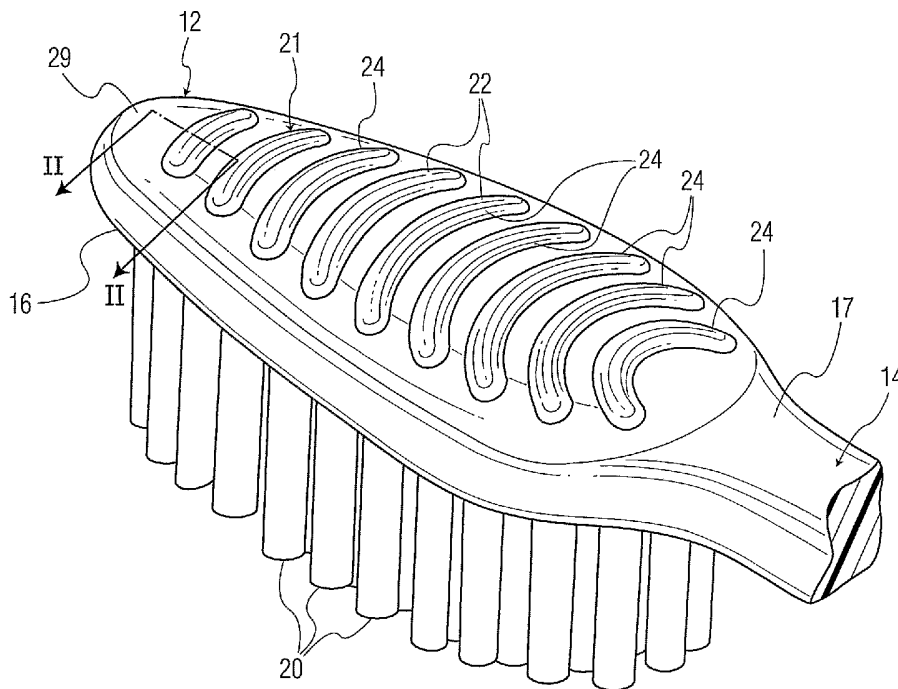
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(54) Title: ORAL CARE IMPLEMENT



(57) Abstract: An oral care implement with a soft tissue cleanser is provided to effectively cleanse the soft tissue of the mouth with comfort and a reduced risk of injury to the user. In one construction, a projection is formed of a combination of a hard material and a soft material. The hard material provides good stability for cleaning debris from the tongue or other tissue while the soft material provides comfort and a reduced risk of injury.

WO 2006/065496 A2



For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

ORAL CARE IMPLEMENT

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[01] The present invention pertains to an oral care implement with a tongue cleanser for cleansing the tongue and other soft tissue in the mouth.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[02] According to the American Dental Association, bad breath in healthy people is often attributable to microbial deposits on the tongue. Due to its papillary nature, the tongue creates a unique ecological site that provides a large surface area, which favors the accumulation of oral bacteria. Anaerobic flora and bacteria residing on the tongue can lead to the development of chronic bad breath commonly called halitosis.

[03] While tongue scrapers have been used in the past, these scrapers have not adequately met the need. Past scrapers have typically been uncomfortable, risked injury to the user, and/or lacked effectiveness. Hence, there is a need for an oral care implement with a tongue cleanser that provides effective removal of bacteria and other debris with comfort and safety.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[04] The present invention pertains to an oral care implement with a tongue cleanser provided with a unique combination of hard and soft materials to effectively cleanse the tongue and other soft tissue within the mouth with comfort and a reduced risk of injury to the user.

[05] In one aspect of the invention, a tongue cleanser is formed of two components that combine to define at least one cleaning projection that extends from a head of an implement. One component of the tongue cleanser is composed of a relatively hard material to provide stability and effective cleaning of the soft tissue. The other component is composed of a relatively soft material to provide comfort and safety to the user during use of the implement.

[06] In one exemplary construction of the invention, the tongue cleanser includes a base composed of a relatively hard material that protrudes from a surface of the head, and a soft material that at least partially overlies the base. The hard

base provides good stability for cleaning bacteria and debris from the tongue or other tissue, while the soft layer provides comfort and a reduced risk of injury. In one embodiment, the tip of the base is covered with the soft material. In another embodiment, a small extension of the base tip is exposed through the soft material.

- [07] In another exemplary construction, the tongue cleanser includes a projection formed of a soft material, which is embedded in a hard base for enhanced rigidity. In one embodiment, the projection is a tapering member with a narrow tip to engage and clean soft tissue in the mouth and a wide base portion anchored in a hard material portion of the head. The soft material engages the tongue for comfort and safety. The hard material provides enhanced stiffness and stability to the cleanser.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- [08] Figure 1 is a perspective view of a head of a toothbrush in accordance with the present invention.
- [09] Figure 2 is a partial cross-sectional view taken along line II-II in Figure 1.
- [10] Figures 3-6 are partial cross sectional views alternative structures taken along line II-II of Figure 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

- [11] An oral care implement in accordance with the present invention is illustrated and described in the form of a toothbrush 10 (Figs. 1 and 2). Nevertheless, the invention could be encompassed into other oral care implements, including simply a tissue-cleansing implement. Toothbrush 10 includes a head 12 and a handle 14. While Figure 1 only illustrates the connection of the handle to the head, the handle is preferably an elongate member to be grasped by the user. The handle 14 could have any known shape and construction adapted for the manipulation needed to clean the teeth and/or tongue of a user. Head 12 includes a pair of opposite sides 16, 17 with teeth cleaning elements 20 extending from side 16 and a soft tissue cleanser 21 provided on side 17. While such soft tissue cleanser 21 may be used to impact areas of the mouth other than the teeth, it is primarily intended for use as a tongue cleanser and

will be described herein as such for purposes of convenience. Although head 12 is shown with an oblong shape, other known shapes could be used.

- [12] The teeth cleaning elements 20 could be bristles and/or elastomeric members of various shapes and sizes. Any form or combination of elements 20 suitable for cleaning a user's teeth could be used.
- [13] Tongue cleanser 21 includes at least one projection 22, and preferably a plurality of projections, to cleanse the tongue and other soft tissue of the mouth (e.g., the inner surfaces of the cheeks). While the projections are preferably formed on a head also provided with teeth cleaning elements 20, they could be formed on other implements or other parts of the toothbrush. Any reference to a head of an implement is simply meant to be a reference to the operative portion of the implement that is inserted into the mouth, and does not refer to a particular shape, structure or location of the head. In the present invention, each of the projections is formed by a combination of hard and soft materials to provide the beneficial effects of superior cleaning of the tongue (or other soft tissue) with comfort and safety from injury.
- [14] In one embodiment (Figs. 1 and 2), a plurality of projections 22 are formed to extend across a back side 17 of head 12. Each projection includes a base portion 28 protruding from the head, and a layer 29 overlying the base portion (Fig 2). Base 28 is composed of a relatively rigid material such as Polypropylene, although many other materials could be used. The base portion is preferably formed as part of the head as shown in Figure 2, but could be separately formed and attached to the head by adhesive, fasteners or the like. Layer 29 is preferably a thermoplastic elastomer such as Santoprene, Thermolast-K, Dynaflex, although many other materials could also be used so long as they are compatible for oral care and soft enough to provide the desired comfort and/or safety benefits. While projections 22 are described and shown as ridges 24, they could have a non-ridge construction (e.g., columnar or conical) if desired. Various shapes and cross-sectional configurations of projections 22 are contemplated.
- [15] In this one construction, base 28 tapers to a narrow tip 32 to better dig into the recesses in the tongue and remove bacteria and debris. As shown, the base can

be formed to have a generally triangular cross section, though other narrowing shapes could be used. Moreover, constant cross-sectional shapes, non-tapering shapes or those that do not taper to a narrow tip could also be used if desired. The soft overlayer 29 overlies the entire back side 17 of head 12 for enhanced comfort and safety; i.e., layer 29 protects users from cutting or injuring their tongues or other tissue even when very narrow tips are used to define ridges 24. Soft layer 29 is preferably molded over side 17 of head 12, but could be otherwise secured such as by adhesive, fasteners, etc. Alternatively, a soft layer or covering 29a could be formed to cover only the tips 32a of ridges 24a of tongue cleanser 21a (Fig. 3). Of course, other variations in coverage of the projections by overlayer 29 could be used. For example, the soft material component 29 could cover more or less of the base 28 than is shown in Figure 3, or could cover bases 28 and only a part of side 17 of head 12 without covering the entire side. In one example, base 28 extends 0.5 to 1 mm from side 17 of head 12, and soft material component 29 is 0.3 to 0.5 mm thick. Nevertheless, many other smaller and greater extensions and thicknesses could be used to form projections.

- [16] In one other embodiment (Fig. 4), tongue cleanser 21b includes at least one ridge 24b defined by a base portion 28b and an overlayer 29b. As with the earlier embodiment, base 28b is formed of a relatively hard material, which in the preferred construction is formed as a unitary portion of the head. As with the earlier embodiment, base 28b preferably tapers to a narrow tip 32b to effectively remove bacteria and debris, although other shapes could be used. Overlayer 29b is composed of a relatively soft material, which partially covers base portion 28b. However, in this construction, the tip 32b of base portion 28b is left uncovered, while the remaining portion of the base is covered by the soft component 29b. Nevertheless, comfort and safety are maintained with the exposed tip 32b, even when narrowed, by limiting the extension of the exposed tip beyond the soft material 29b. More specifically, tongues or other soft tissue within the mouth tend to give or flex as the ridges contact and move over them. This flexibility enables a short tip 32b to pass over the tongue or

other tissue without injuring the user. As a result, comfort and safety are maintained.

- [17] In one such construction, base portion 28b protrudes outward from a recess 40 formed in side 17b of head 12b. In this example, since base 28b is formed as an elongate ridge, recess 40 has the form of an elongate channel extending across side 17b. If the projection were instead, for example, columnar, the recess would then preferably encircle the projection. The soft component 29b fills and is secured in recess 40 about base 28, and defines an outer surface 42 that gradually extends to a position proximate tip 32b. In the illustrated example, outer surface 42 of overlayer 29 has a broad curved, convex shape against which the tongue or other tissue slides. This outer surface, however, could have many different shapes so long as it provides a surface against which the tongue or other tissue can slide and be exposed to only a small portion of the underlying base 28b. In this one example shown in Figure 4, base 28b has a height (i.e., from the bottom of recess 40 to tip 32b) of 1 mm, and extends 0.5 mm beyond outer surface 42, though these dimensions could vary considerably. Moreover, the construction could vary. For example, recess 40 could be eliminated and the hard component formed as a shorter base that extends directly from a generally planar back side 17. In this construction, soft component would preferably be a generally uniform layer overlying at least part of the back side of the head and part of the base. Also, alternatively, the tip portion of the relatively hard first component could be secured to the relatively soft second component (not shown) rather than the being directly fixed to the head.
- [18] In another embodiment (Fig. 5), tongue cleanser 21c is formed by a soft material component 29c that defines a projection 48 which is embedded in a relatively hard base 49, preferably a hard base portion of head 12c. In this construction, projection 48 preferably protrudes from a recess 50 defined in side 17c of head 12c; although recess 50 could be omitted. Projection 48 preferably extends outwardly from the recess 50 and above a plane 55 defined by the side 17c such that the projection 48 is raised relative to the side 17c to provide increased cleaning benefits. Nevertheless, tip 56 of the projection

may be generally co-extensive with plane 55 so long as contact with the soft tissue still occurs. Recess 50 is similar to recess 40 discussed above, except that in this construction the recess remains open. In this example, since the projection is formed as an elongate ridge, recess 50 would be an elongate channel extending across the head. Ridge 48 is anchored into the head to provide a stiffer member, despite being a soft material, to provide an effective cleansing of the tongue and other tissue. In the illustrated example, ridge 48 has a height (extending from the bottom of recess 50) of about 1 mm, and a projection above back side 17c of about 0.5 mm. Nevertheless, wide variations from these dimensions may be used.

- [19] In the one construction, projection 48 includes an anchoring portion 54 that is embedded in base 49 (which is preferably a portion of head 12) and a tip 56 for contacting the soft tissue. Projection 48 preferably tapers from anchoring portion 54 to tip 56 to define a narrowed tip for effectively cleaning of the tongue and other tissue, and a broad anchoring portion for greater support and stiffness. Nevertheless, other tapering and non-tapering projections could be used.
- [20] Furthermore, the construction of Fig. 5 illustrates one example of a concavity defined within side 17c (i.e., the recess 50) that includes a tissue-cleaning convexity (i.e., projection 48) extending outwardly therefrom. As noted above, the concavity can be defined as an elongate depression or ridge or a hemispherical recess, with other concavities being contemplated. In addition, the convexity can be any shape and/or cross-section including, but not limited to, those projection shapes disclosed herein. For instance, the convexity can be a column 60 of constant cross-section extending from a concavity 62 of square profile as shown in Fig. 6.
- [21] Although the tongue cleanser of the present invention has been discussed primarily in connection with a plurality of ridges that extend laterally across the head, the concepts of the invention are applicable to all kinds of projections usable as a tongue cleanser. For example, the ridges may have all kinds of shapes and configurations on the head as disclosed in co-pending US Patent Application Serial No. 10/989,267, entitled Oral Care Implement, filed

November 17, 2004, which is hereby incorporated by reference. Moreover, the projections may be formed as non-ridge projections or a mixture of ridge and non-ridge projections, such as disclosed in the co-pending application US Patent Application Serial No. 10/989,267 or in co-pending US Patent Application Serial No. 10/869,922, entitled Oral Care Implement and filed June 18, 2004, which is also hereby incorporated by reference.

[22] Also various other changes could be made in the above disclosed constructions without departing from the scope of the invention, it is intended that all matter contained in this application, including all mechanisms and/or modes of interaction described above, shall be interpreted as illustrative only and not limiting in any way the scope of the appended claims.

CLAIMS:

1. An oral care implement comprising a head and at least one projection protruding from the head to cleanse soft tissue within a user's mouth, the projection being formed of two components including a first component composed of a first material and a second component composed of a second material, wherein the first and second materials are different.
2. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 1 wherein the first material is a relatively hard material and the second material is a relatively soft material.
3. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 2 wherein the first component defines a base protruding from the head and the second component at least partially overlies the base.
4. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 3 wherein the base includes a tip remote from the head to engage and clean the soft tissue, and the second component overlies at least the tip of the base.
5. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 4 wherein the tip has a narrow remote end to clean the soft tissue.
6. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 4 wherein the second component covers only the tip.
7. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 4 wherein the second component is a thermoplastic elastomer.
8. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 3 wherein the base protrudes from a first side of the head, and the second component overlies substantially the entire first side of the head.
9. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 8 wherein teeth cleaning elements extend from a second side of the head, which is opposite the first side.
10. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 3 wherein the base includes a tip remote from the head to engage and clean the soft tissue, and the second component overlies substantially the entire base except for the tip.
11. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 10 wherein the uncovered tip of the base projects about 0.5 mm beyond the second component.

12. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 10 wherein the head includes a recess into which a portion of the second component is secured.

13. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 10 wherein the second component defines an outer surface that extends from the first surface to the base.

14. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 13 wherein the outer surface has a generally curved, convex shape.

15. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 10 wherein the second component is a thermoplastic elastomer.

16. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 3 wherein the base is formed as a unitary portion of the head.

17. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 3 wherein the first component is composed of a relatively hard plastic material.

18. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 17 wherein the second component is composed of a thermoplastic elastomer.

19. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 3 wherein the second component is composed of a thermoplastic elastomer.

20. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 1 wherein the first component is composed of a relatively hard plastic material.

21. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 1 wherein the second component is composed of a thermoplastic elastomer.

22. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 1 wherein the first component defines an outwardly directed tip to contact the soft tissue, and the second component extends from the head to the tip to define an outer surface against which the soft tissue moves to the tip.

23. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 22 wherein the first component includes a base portion directly fixed to the head and at least partially covered by the second component.

24. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 1 wherein the projection is at least one ridge.

25. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 1 further including a plurality of said projections protruding from the head.

26. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 1 wherein the second component includes an anchoring portion embedded into the first component and a tip portion remote from the head to engage and clean soft tissue within a user's mouth.

27. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 26 wherein the second component is formed of a thermoplastic elastomer.

28. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 26 wherein a recess is formed in the head about the projection.

29. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 26 wherein the projection is formed as a ridge.

30. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 26 further including a plurality of said projections.

31. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 26 wherein the projection includes a narrowed tip to engage and clean the soft tissue.

32. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 1 wherein the projection has a generally constant cross-section.

33. An oral care implement comprising a head and an outer surface, at least one concavity formed in said outer surface and at least one convexity extending outwardly from said concavity, said concavity being larger than the convexity at the outer surface such that a wall portion of the concavity is visible to a user.

34. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 33, wherein the concavity is formed from a first material and the convexity is formed from a second material that is different from said first material.

35. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 34 wherein the first material is a relatively hard material and the second material is a relatively soft material.

36. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 35 wherein the first component is composed of a relatively hard plastic material.

37. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 35 wherein the second component is composed of a thermoplastic elastomer.

38. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 33 wherein teeth cleaning elements extend from a side of the head opposite the outer surface.

39. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 33 wherein the convexity is a ridge and the concavity is a channel.

40. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 33 wherein the convexity is generally columnar and the concavity surrounds the convexity.

41. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 40 wherein the concavity has a generally parallelepiped shape.

42. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 40 wherein the concavity has a generally cylindrical shape.

43. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 33 wherein the convexity tapers to a narrowed tip.

44. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 33 further including a plurality of said convexities protruding a plurality of said concavities defined in the head.

45. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 33 wherein the convexity includes an anchoring portion embedded into the concavity and a tip portion remote from the head to engage and clean soft tissue within a user's mouth.

46. An oral care implement comprising a head having a first side and at least one projection protruding from the first side to cleanse soft tissue within a user's mouth, the at least one projection being formed of a first material and having a tip, at least a portion of the first side being covered by a second material different from the first material, the tip of the at least one projection being free of the second material.

47. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 46 wherein the first material is a relatively hard material and the second material is a relatively soft material.

48. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 47 wherein the first component defines a base protruding from the head and the second component at least partially overlies the base.

49. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 46 wherein at least a portion of the head is formed from the first material.

50. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 49 wherein the at least one projection is integral with the head.

51. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 47 wherein the second material is a thermoplastic elastomer.

52. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 46 wherein the second material overlies substantially the entire first side of the head.

53. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 46 wherein teeth cleaning elements extend from a second side of the head, which is opposite the first side.

54. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 47 wherein the first material is a hard plastic material.

55. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 54 wherein the second material is a thermoplastic elastomer.

56. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 46 wherein the at least one projection is in the form of at least one arcuate ridge.

57. An oral care implement in accordance with claim 47 further comprising a plurality of said projections protruding from the head.

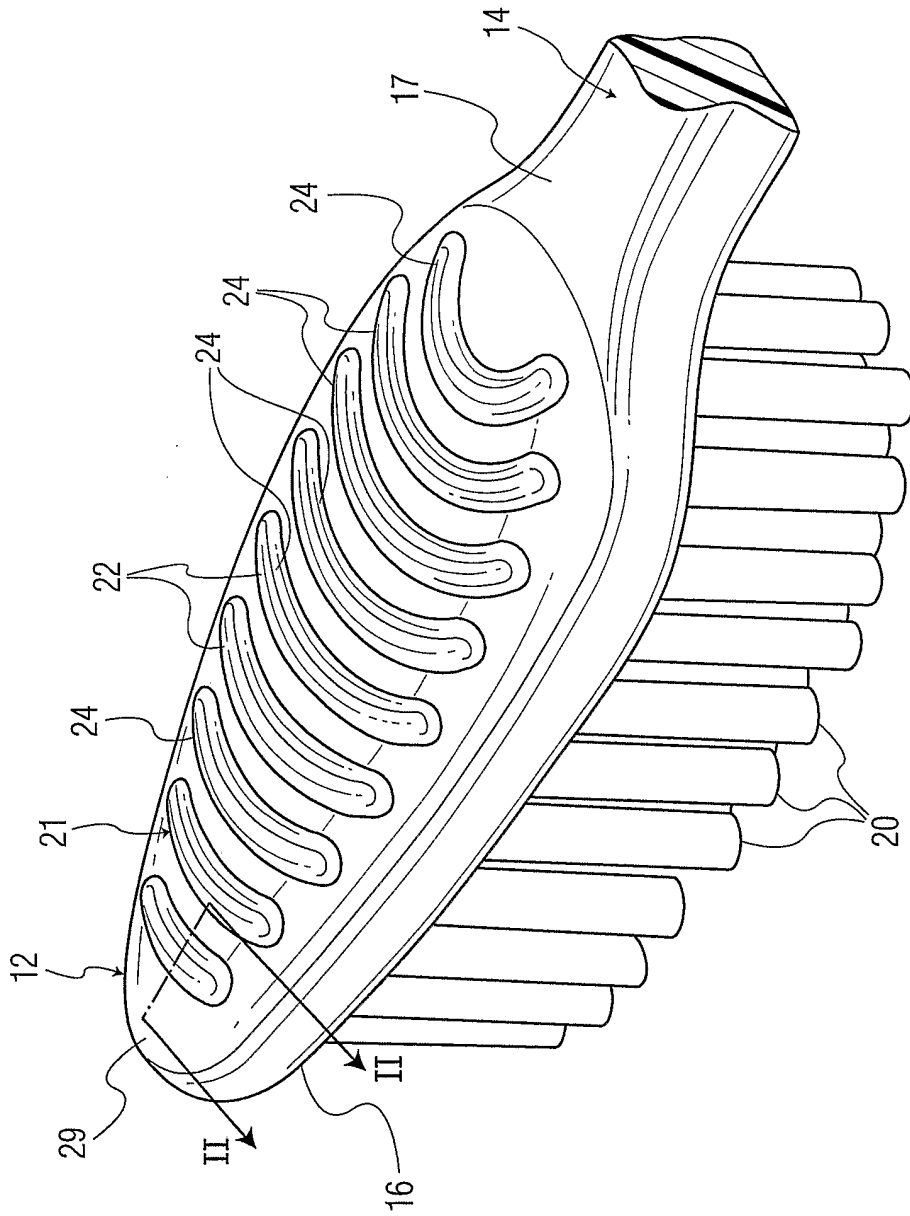


FIG. 1

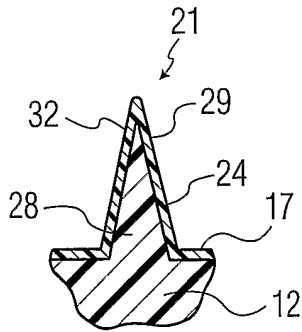


FIG. 2

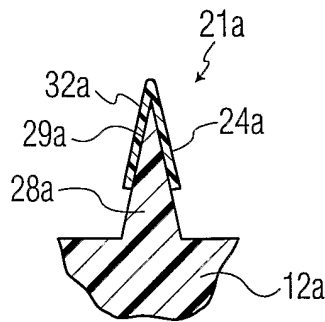


FIG. 3

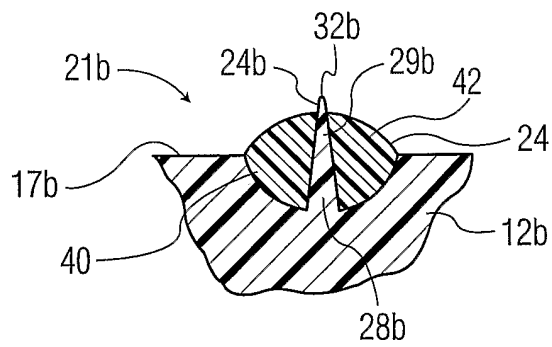


FIG. 4

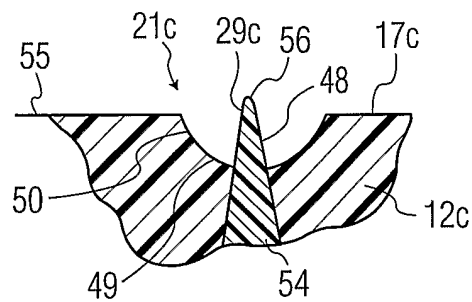


FIG. 5

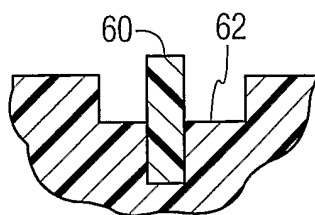


FIG. 6