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(54) **LONGITUDINALLY FLEXIBLE STENT**

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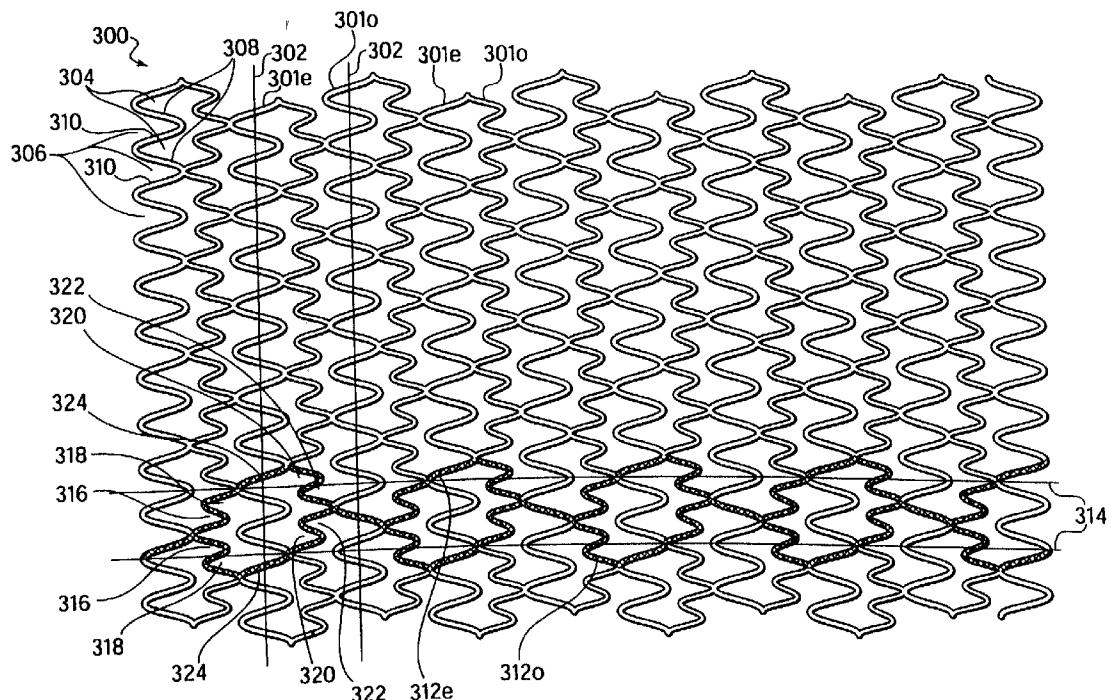
(57) ABSTRACT

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A stent has a first loop containing section arranged in a circumferential direction and defining loops therein occurring at a first frequency, a second loop containing section arranged in the circumferential direction and defining loops therein occurring at the first frequency, and a third loop containing section disposed in a generally circumferential space between the first loop containing section and the second loop containing section and coupling the first loop containing section to the second loop containing section for defining cells therebetween, the third loop containing section defining loops therein occurring at a second frequency that is greater than the first frequency.

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 09/516,753, filed on Mar. 1, 2000.



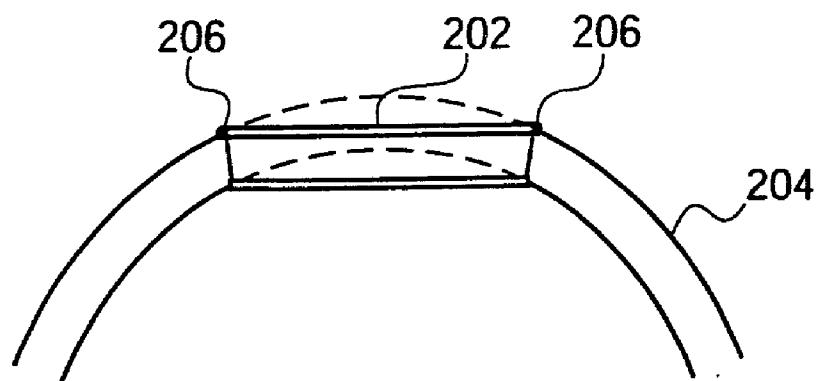


FIG. 1

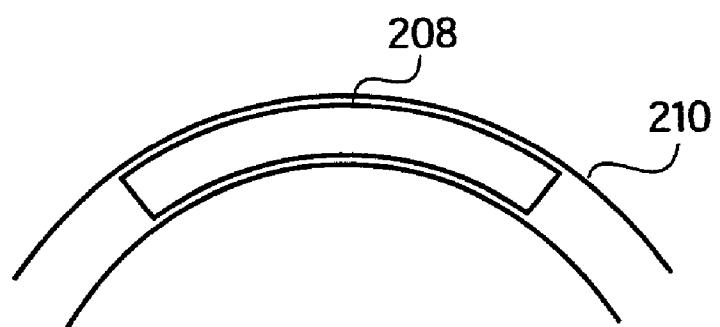
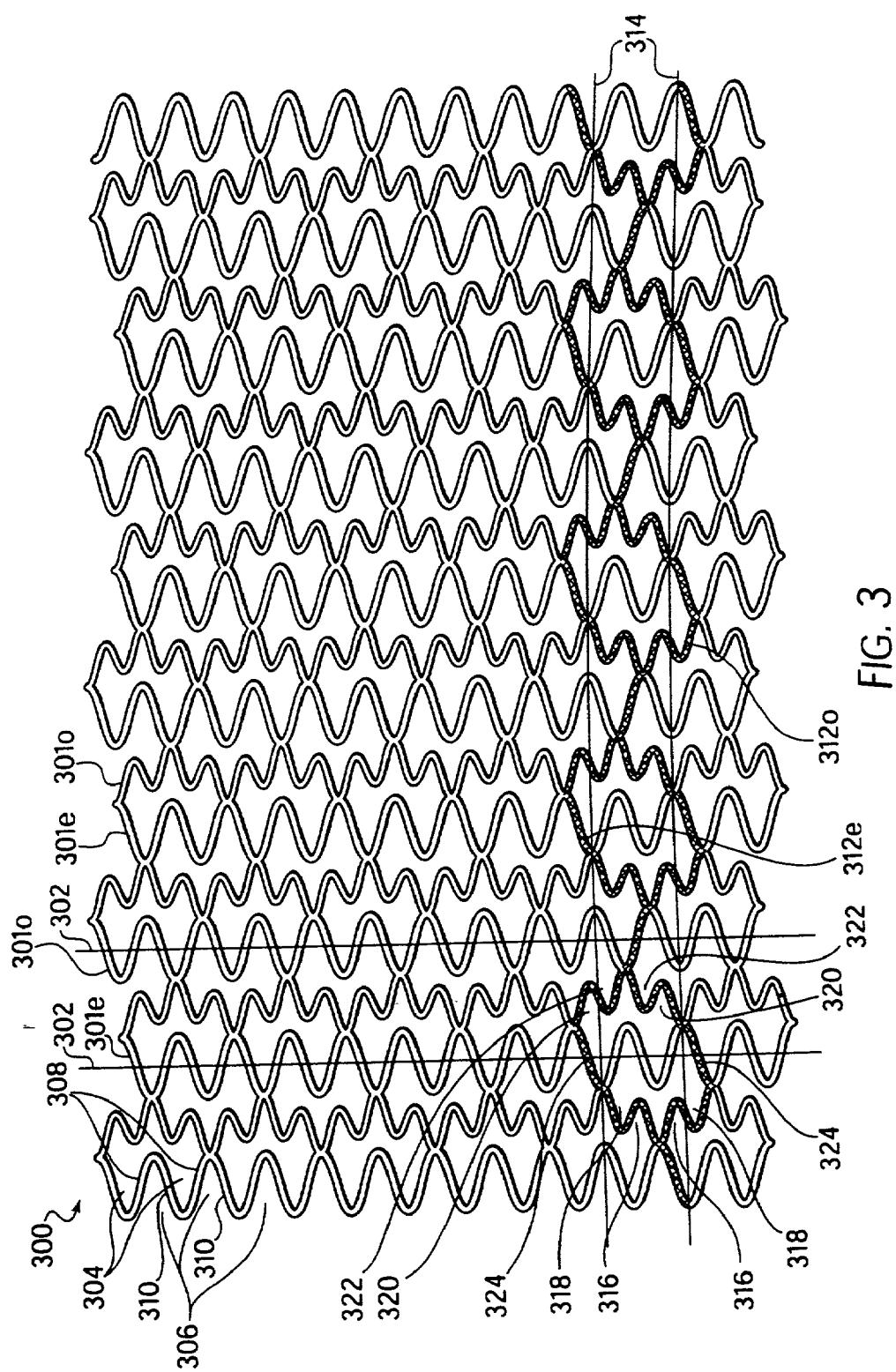


FIG. 2



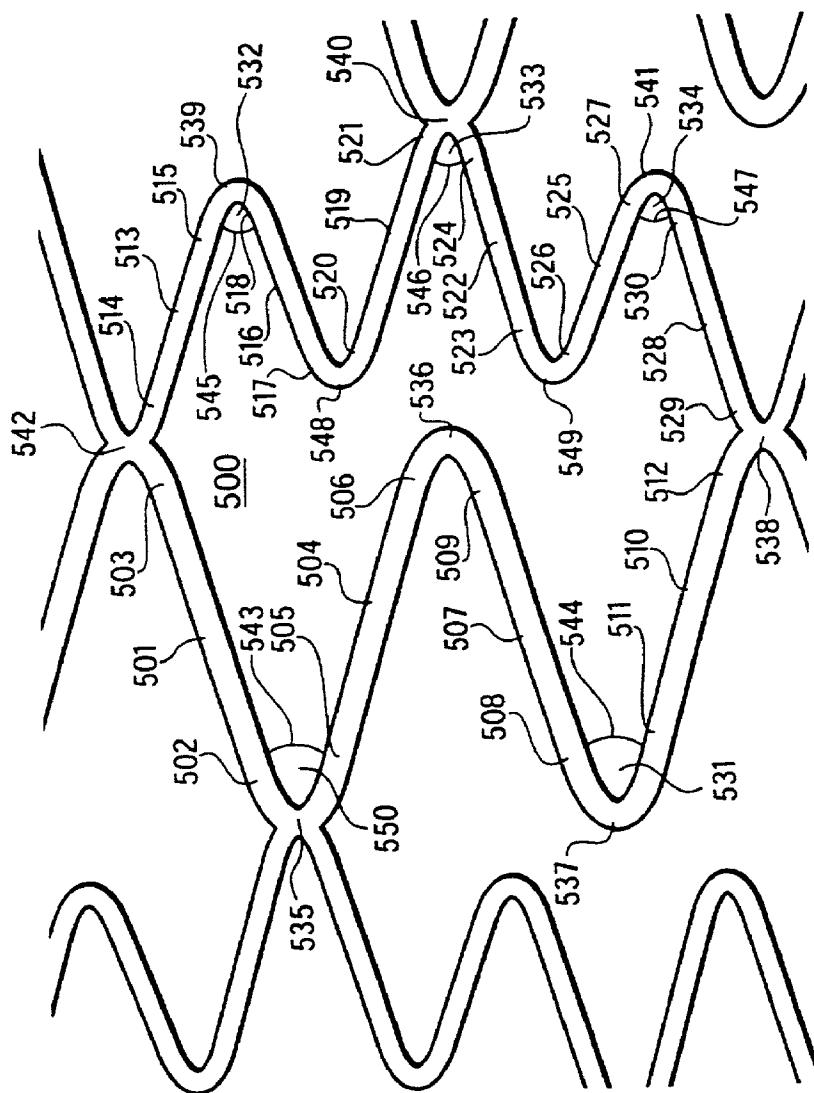


FIG. 4

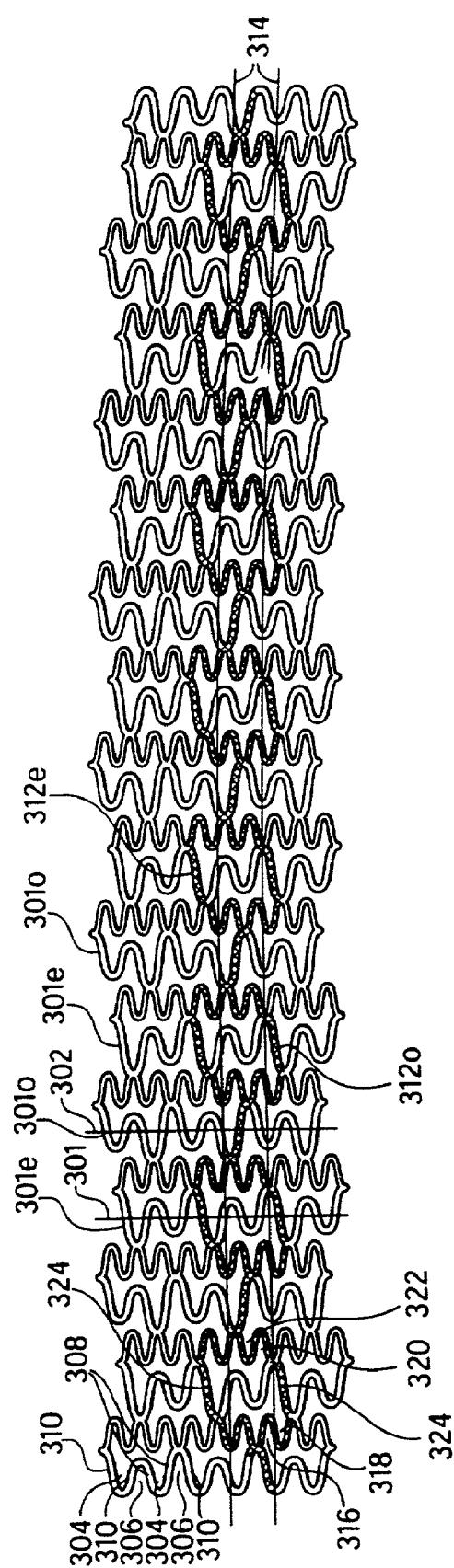


FIG. 5

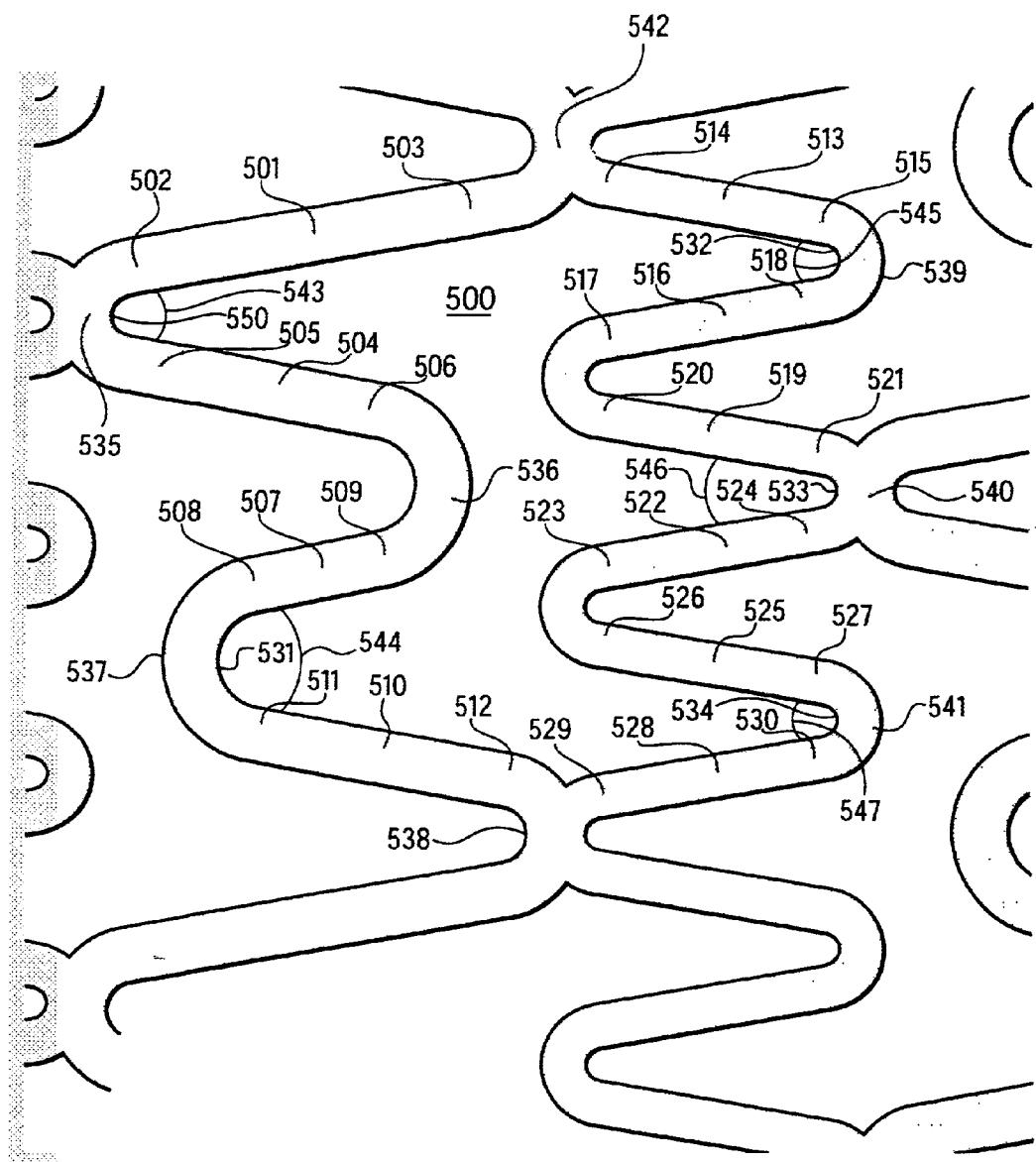


FIG. 6

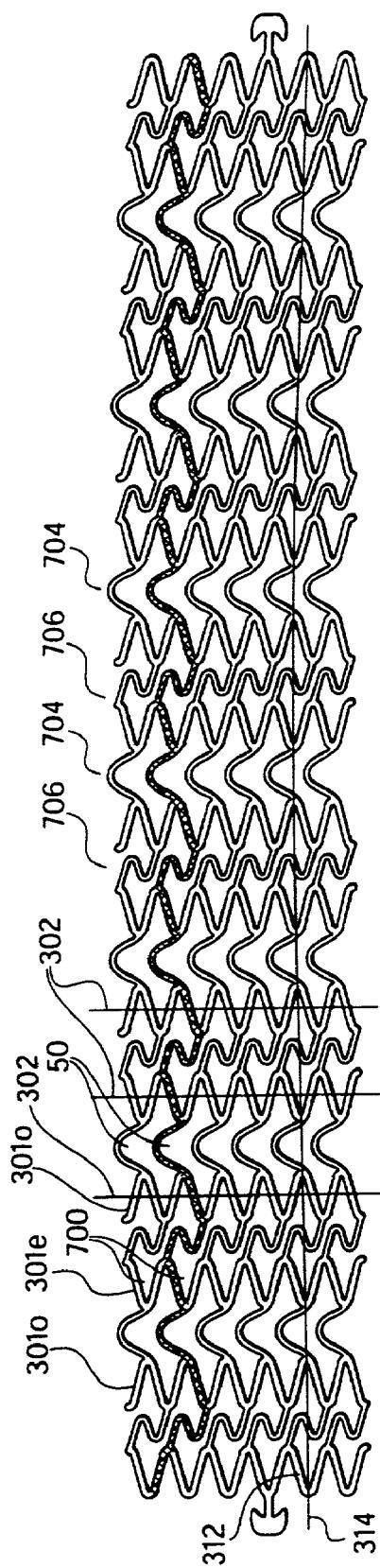


FIG. 7

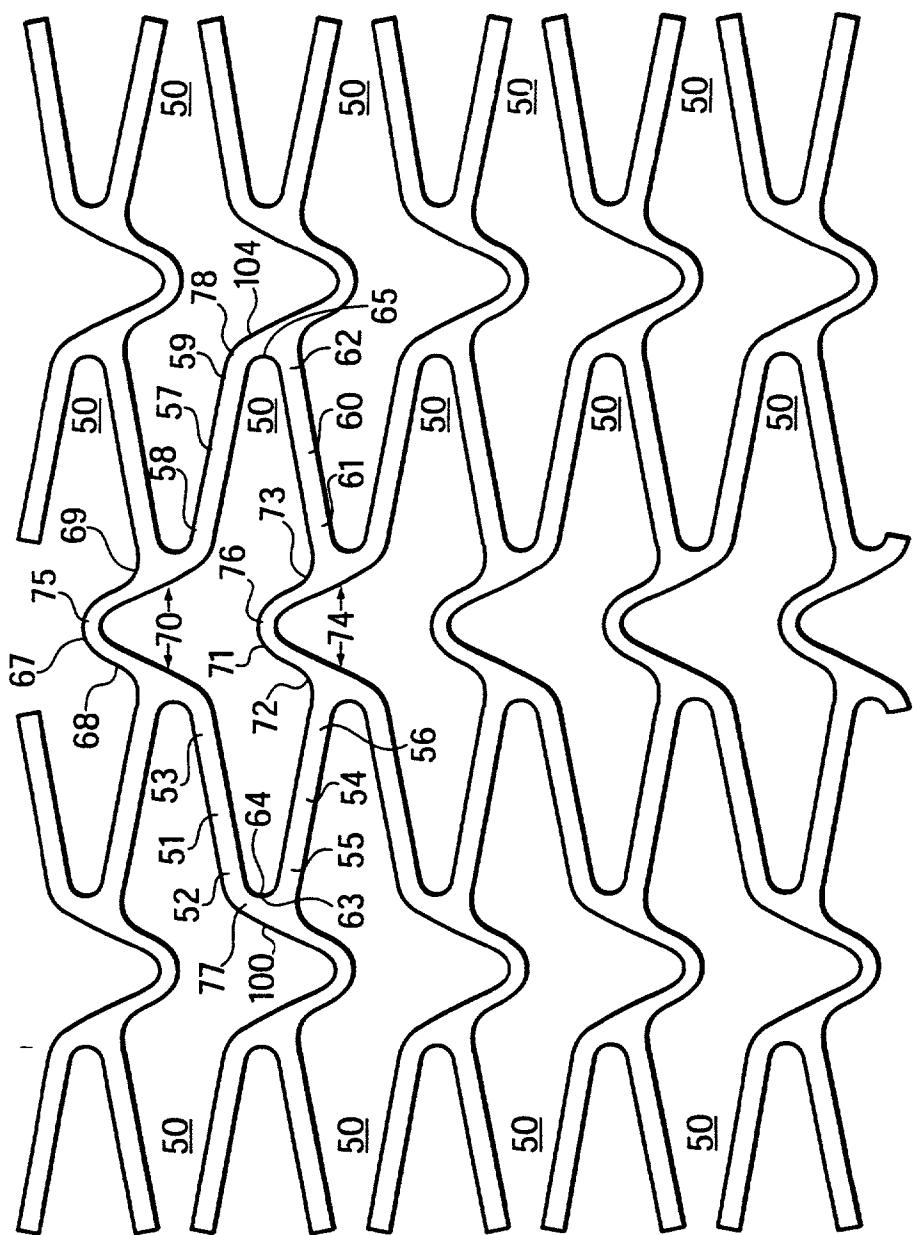


FIG. 8

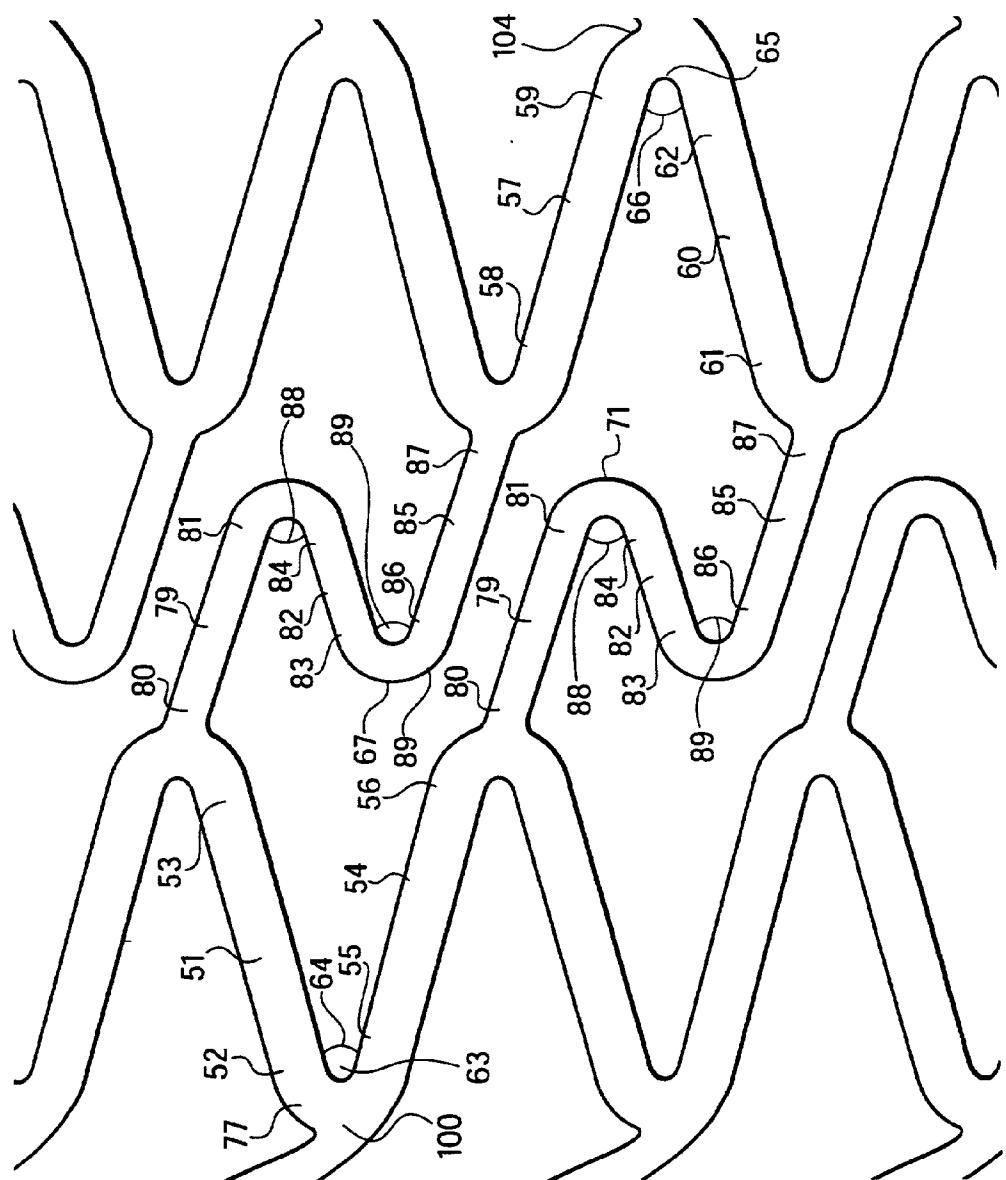


FIG. 9

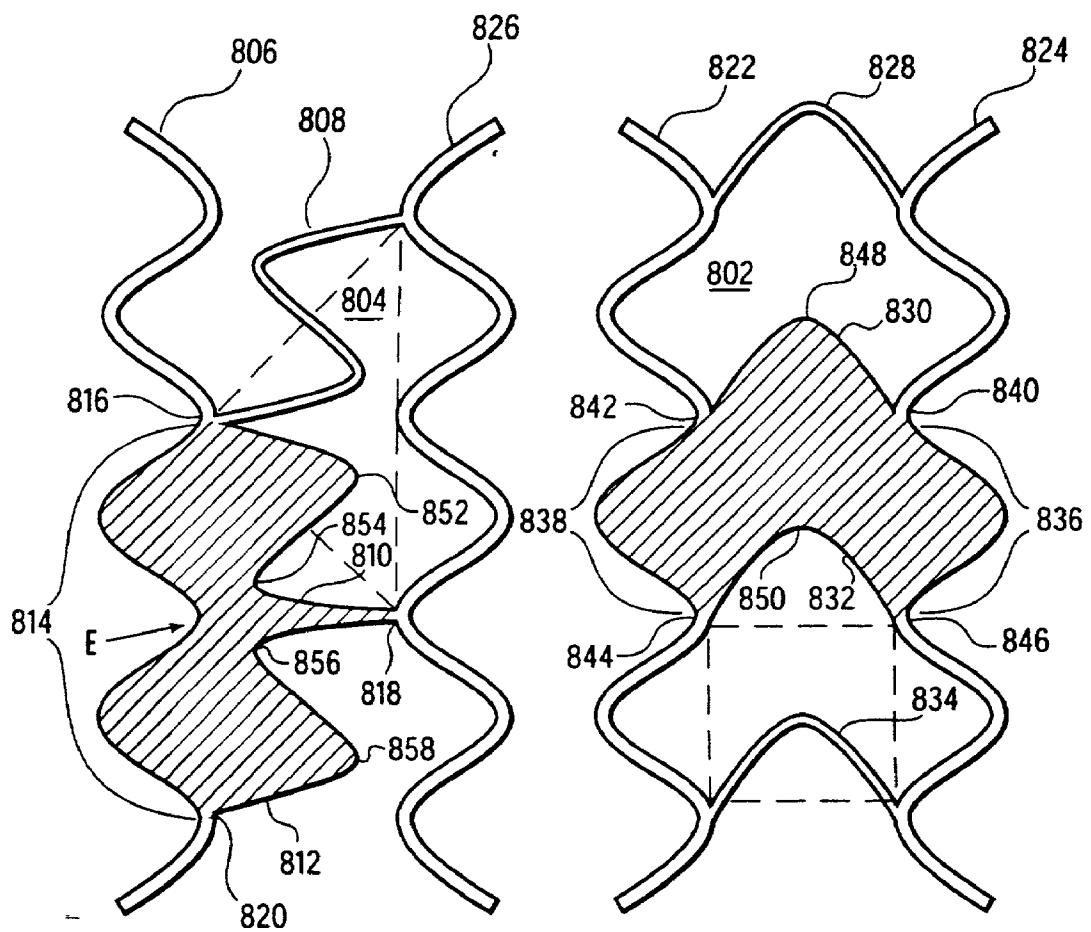


FIG. 10

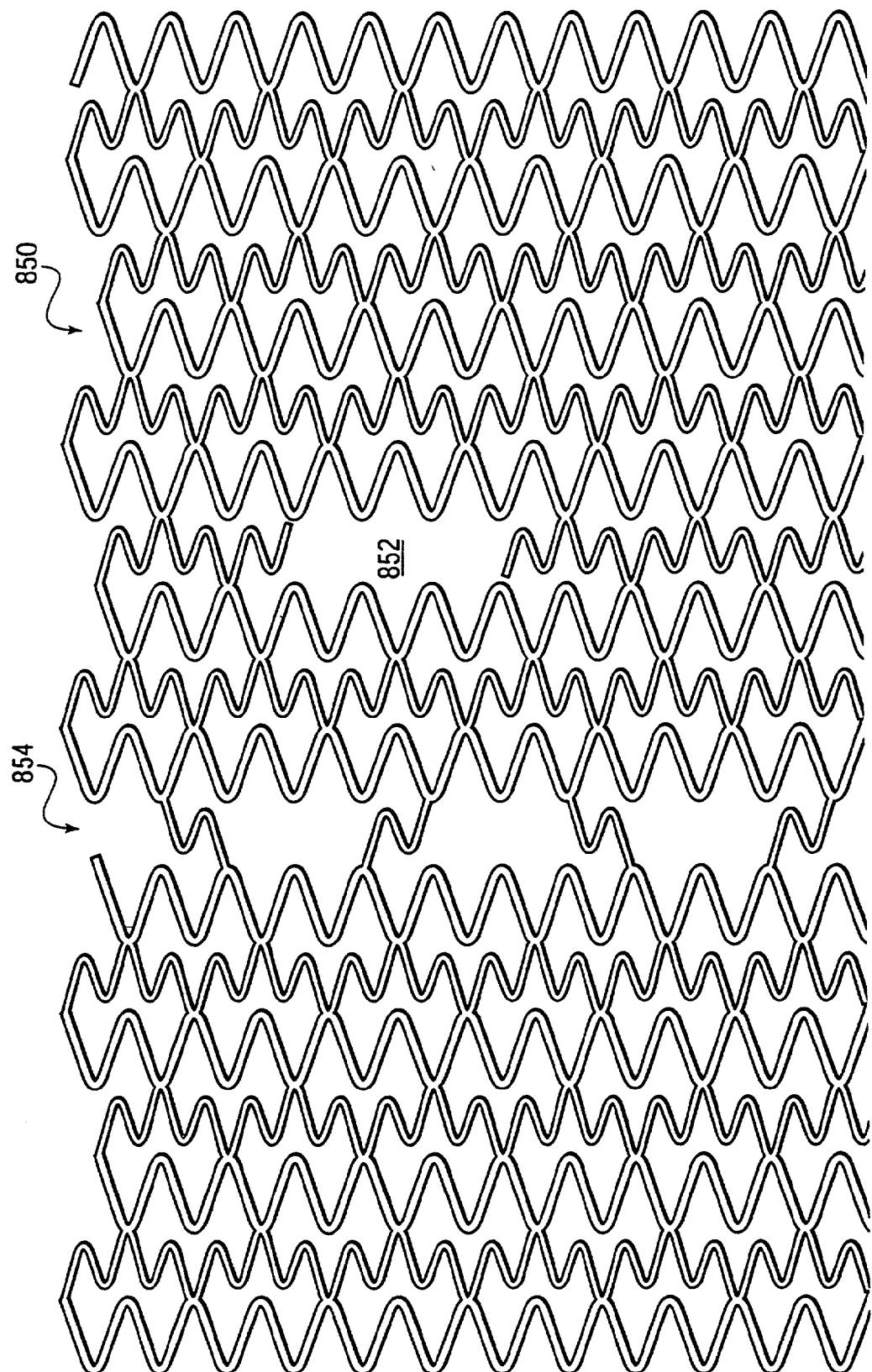


FIG. 11

LONGITUDINALLY FLEXIBLE STENT

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation of application Ser. No. 09/516,753, filed Mar. 1, 2000.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates generally to stents, which are endoprostheses implanted into vessels within the body, such as blood vessels, to support and hold open the vessels, or to secure and support other endoprostheses in the vessels. In particular, the present invention relates to a stent which is longitudinally flexible before after expansion.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Various stents are known in the art. Typically stents are generally tubular in shape, and are expandable from a relatively small, unexpanded diameter to a larger, expanded diameter. For implantation, the stent is typically mounted on the end of a catheter, with the stent being held on the catheter at its relatively small, unexpanded diameter. By the catheter, the unexpanded stent is directed through the lumen to the intended implantation site. Once the stent is at the intended implantation site, it is expanded, typically either by an internal force, for example by inflating a balloon on the inside of the stent, or by allowing the stent to self-expand, for example by removing a sleeve from around a self-expanding stent, allowing the stent to expand outwardly. In either case, the expanded stent resists the tendency of the vessel to narrow, thereby maintaining the vessel's patency.

[0004] U.S. Pat. No. 5,733,303 to Israel et al. ("303"), which is expressly incorporated by reference, shows a unique stent formed of a tube having a patterned shape which has first and second meander patterns having axes extending in first and second directions. The second meander patterns are intertwined with the first meander patterns to form flexible cells. Stents such as this one are very flexible in their unexpanded state such that they can be tracked easily down tortuous lumens. Upon expansion, these stents provide excellent radial support, stability, and coverage of the vessel wall. These stents are also conformable, in that they adapt to the shape of the vessel wall during implantation.

[0005] One feature of stents with a cellular mesh design such as this one, however, is that they have limited longitudinal flexibility after expansion, which may be a disadvantage in particular applications. This limited longitudinal flexibility may cause stress points at the end of the stent and along the length of the stent. Conventional mesh stents like that shown in U.S. Pat. No. 4,733,665 may simply lack longitudinal flexibility, which is illustrated by FIG. 1, a schematic diagram of a conventional stent 202 in a curved vessel 204.

[0006] To implant a stent, it may be delivered to a desired site by a balloon catheter when the stent is in an unexpanded state. The balloon catheter is then inflated to expand the stent, affixing the stent into place. Due to the high inflation pressures of the balloon—up to 20 atm—the balloon causes the curved vessel 204 and even a longitudinally flexible stent to straighten when it is inflated. If the stent, because of the configuration of its mesh is or becomes relatively rigid after expansion, then the stent remains or tends to remain in the

same or substantially the same shape after deflation of the balloon. However, the artery attempts to return to its natural curve (indicated by dashed lines) in FIG. 1 with reference to a conventional mesh stent. The mismatch between the natural curve of the artery and the straightened section of the artery with a stent may cause points of stress concentration 206 at the ends of the stent and stress along the entire stent length. The coronary vasculature can impose additional stress on stents because the coronary vasculature moves relatively significant amounts with each heartbeat. For illustration purposes, the difference between the curve of the vessel and the straightened stent has been exaggerated in FIG. 1.

[0007] U.S. Pat. No. 5,807,404 to Richter, which is expressly incorporated by reference, shows another stent which is especially suited for implantation into curved arterial portions or ostial regions. This stent can include sections adjacent the end of the stent with greater bending flexibility than the remaining axial length of the stent. While this modification at the end of the stent alleviates the stress at the end points, it does not eliminate the stress along the entire length of the stent.

[0008] Various stents are known that retain longitudinal flexibility after expansion. For example, U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,886,062 and 5,133,732 to Wiktor ("the Wiktor '062 and '732 patents") show various stents formed of wire wherein the wire is initially formed into a band of zig-zags forming a serpentine pattern, and then the zig-zag band is coiled into a helical stent. The stents are expanded by an internal force, for example by inflating a balloon.

[0009] The coiled zig-zag stents that are illustrated in FIGS. 1 through 6 of the Wiktor '062 and '732 patents are longitudinally flexible both in the expanded and unexpanded condition such that they can be tracked easily down tortuous lumens and such that they conform relatively closely to the compliance of the vessel after deployment. While these stents are flexible, they also have relatively unstable support after expansion. Furthermore, these stents leave large portions of the vessel wall uncovered, allowing tissue and plaque prolapse into the lumen of the vessel.

[0010] Thus, it is desired to have a stent which exhibits longitudinal flexibility before expansion such that it can easily be tracked down tortuous lumens and longitudinal flexibility after expansion such that it can comply with the vessel's natural flexibility and curvature while still providing continuous, stable coverage of a vessel wall that will minimize tissue sag into the lumen.

OBJECTS AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0011] Accordingly, an object of the invention is to provide a stent that is longitudinally flexible before expansion so that it can easily be tracked down tortuous vessels and remains longitudinally flexible after expansion such that it will substantially eliminate any stress points by complying with the vessel's flexibility and assuming the natural curve of the vessel.

[0012] Another object of the present invention is to provide a stent that is longitudinally flexible after delivery such that it flexes during the cycles of the heartbeat to reduce cyclic stress at the ends of the stent and along the stent.

[0013] Another object of the present invention is to provide a stent with a closed cell pattern such that it provides good coverage and support to a vessel wall after expansion.

[0014] Other advantages of the present invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art.

[0015] In accordance with these objects, the stent of the present invention is formed to be a tube having a patterned shape which has first and second meander patterns having axes extending in first and second direction wherein the second meander patterns are intertwined with the first meander patterns.

[0016] In accordance with one embodiment of the invention, the intertwined meander patterns form cells which have three points at which the first and second meander patterns meet each other, and which in this sense could be called triangular cells. These three cornered or triangular cells are flexible about the longitudinal axis of the stent after expansion. These triangular cells provide comparable scaffolding and radial strength to that of cells formed by intertwined meander patterns which have four points at which the first and second patterns meet each other, and which in this sense could be called square cells.

[0017] In another embodiment of the invention, bands of cells are provided along the length of a stent. The bands of cells alternate between cells adapted predominantly to enhance radial support with cells that are adapted predominantly to enhance longitudinal flexibility after expansion.

[0018] In another embodiment of the invention, the first meander patterns are adapted to prevent any "flaring out" of loops of the first meander patterns during delivery of the stent.

[0019] A stent according to the invention retains the longitudinal flexibility associated with the '303 cellular stent in its unexpanded state, and has increased longitudinal flexibility in the expanded state. The stent does so without sacrificing scaffolding—i.e. coverage of the vessel wall—or radial support.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0020] FIG. 1 shows a schematic diagram of a conventional rigid stent deployed in a curved lumen;

[0021] FIG. 2 shows a schematic diagram of a stent of the present invention deployed in a curved lumen;

[0022] FIG. 3 shows a pattern for a stent made in accordance with the present invention;

[0023] FIG. 4 shows an enlarged view of one cell of the pattern of FIG. 3;

[0024] FIG. 5 shows a pattern for a stent made in accordance with the present invention;

[0025] FIG. 6 shows an enlarged view of one cell of the pattern of FIG. 5;

[0026] FIG. 7 shows a pattern for a stent made in accordance with the present invention;

[0027] FIG. 8 shows an enlarged view of one cell used in the pattern of FIG. 7;

[0028] FIG. 9 shows an enlarged view of another cell used in FIG. 7;

[0029] FIG. 10 shows a schematic comparison of a four cornered or "square cell" and a three cornered or "triangular" cell of the present invention.

[0030] FIG. 11 shows a pattern for a stent constructed according to the principles of the invention which has variable geometry along its length.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0031] FIG. 2 shows a schematic diagram of a longitudinally flexible stent 208 of the present invention. The stent 208 may be delivered to a curved vessel 210 by a balloon catheter, and implanted in the artery by inflating the balloon. As described before, the balloon causes the artery to straighten upon inflation of the balloon. However, upon deflation of the balloon, the stent 208 assumes the natural curve of the vessel 210 because it is and remains longitudinally flexible after expansion. This reduces any potential stress points at the ends of the stent and along the length of the stent. Furthermore, because the stent is longitudinally flexible after expansion, the stent will flex longitudinally with the vessel during the cycles caused by a heartbeat. This also reduces any cyclic stress at the ends of the stent and along the length of the stent.

[0032] FIG. 3 shows a pattern of a stent according to the present invention. This pattern may be constructed of known materials, and for example stainless steel, but it is particularly suitable to be constructed from NiTi. The pattern can be formed by etching a flat sheet of NiTi into the pattern shown. The flat sheet is formed into a stent by rolling the etched sheet into a tubular shape, and welding the edges of the sheet together to form a tubular stent. The details of this method of forming the stent, which has certain advantages, are disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,836,964 and 5,997,973, which are hereby expressly incorporated by reference. Other methods known to those of skill in the art such as laser cutting a tube or etching a tube may also be used to construct a stent which uses the present invention. After formation into a tubular shape, an NiTi stent is heat treated, as known by those skilled in the art, to take advantage of the shape memory characteristics of NiTi and its superelasticity.

[0033] The pattern 300 is formed from a plurality of each of two orthogonal meander patterns which patterns are intertwined with each other. The term "meander pattern" is taken herein to describe a periodic pattern about a center line and "orthogonal meander patterns" are patterns whose center lines are orthogonal to each other.

[0034] A meander pattern 301 is a vertical sinusoid having a vertical center line 302. A meander pattern 301 has two loops 304 and 306 per period wherein loops 304 open to the right while loops 306 open to the left. Loops 304 and 306 share common members 308 and 310, where member 308 joins one loop 304 to its following loop 306 and member 308 joins one loop 306 to its following loop 304.

[0035] A meander pattern 312 (two of which have been shaded for reference) is a horizontal pattern having a horizontal center line 314. A horizontal meander pattern 312 also has loops labeled 316, 318, 320, 322, and between the loops of a period is a section labeled 324.

[0036] Vertical meander pattern 301 is provided in odd and even (o and e) versions which are 180° out of phase with

each other. Thus, each left opening loop **306** of meander pattern **301o** faces a right opening loop **304** of meander pattern **301e** and a right opening loop **304** of meander pattern **301o** faces a left opening loop **306** of meander pattern **301e**.

[0037] The horizontal meander pattern **312** is also provided in odd and even forms. The straight sections **324** of the horizontal meander pattern **312e** intersect with every third common member **310** of the even vertical meander pattern **301e**. The straight sections **324** of the horizontal meander pattern **312o** also intersect with every third common member **310** of the odd vertical meander pattern **301**.

[0038] Upon expansion of the stent, the loops of the vertical meander patterns **301** open up in the vertical direction. This causes them to shorten in the horizontal direction. The loops in the horizontal meander pattern **312** open up both in the vertical direction and the horizontal direction, compensating for the shortening of the loops of the vertical meander patterns.

[0039] A stent formed from the pattern of **FIG. 3** and made of NiTi is particularly well suited for use in the carotid artery or other lumens subject to an outside pressure. One reason is that because the stent is formed of NiTi, it is reboundable, which is a desirable property for stents placed in the carotid artery. The other reason is that the stent of **FIG. 3** offers excellent scaffolding, which is particularly important in the carotid artery. Scaffolding is especially important in the carotid artery because dislodged particles in the artery may embolize and cause a stroke.

[0040] **FIG. 4** is an expanded view of one flexible cell **500** of the pattern of **FIG. 3**. Each flexible cell **500** includes: a first member **501** having a first end **502** and a second end **503**; a second member **504** having a first end **505** and a second end **506**; a third member **507** having a first end **508** and a second end **509**; and a fourth member **510** having a first end **511** and a second end **512**. The first end **502** of the first member **501** is joined to the first end **505** of the second member **504** by a first curved member **535** to form a first loop **550**, the second end **506** of the second member **504** is joined to the second end **509** of the third member **508** by a second curved member **536**, and the first end **508** of the third member **507** is joined to the first end **511** of the fourth member **510** by a third curved member **537** to form a second loop **531**. The first loop **530** defines a first angle **543**. The second loop **531** defines a second angle **544**. Each cell **500** also includes a fifth member **513** having a first end **514** and a second end **515**; a sixth member **516** having a first end **517** and a second end **518**; a seventh member **519** having a first end **520** and a second end **521**; an eighth member **522** having a first end **523** and a second end **524**; a ninth member **525** having a first end **526** and a second end **527**; and a tenth member having a first end **529** and a second end **530**. The first end **514** of the fifth member **513** is joined to the second end **503** of the first member **501** at second junction point **542**, the second end **515** of the fifth member **513** is joined to the second end **518** of the sixth member by a curved member **539** to form a third loop **532**, the first end **517** of the sixth member **516** is joined to the first end **520** of the seventh member **519** by a fifth curved member **548**, the second end **521** of the seventh member **519** is joined to the second end **524** of the eighth member **522** at third junction point **540** to form a fourth loop **533**, the first end **523** of the eighth

member **522** is joined to the first end **526** of the ninth member **525** by a sixth curved member **549**, the second end **526** of the ninth member **525** is joined to the second end **530** of the tenth member **528** by a seventh curved member **541** to form a fifth loop **534**, and the first end **529** of the tenth member **528** is joined to the second end **512** of the fourth member **510**. The third loop **532** defines a third angle **545**. The fourth loop **533** defines a fourth angle **546**. The fifth loop **534** defines a fifth angle **547**.

[0041] In the embodiment shown in **FIG. 4**, the first member **501**, the third member **507**, the sixth member **516**, the eighth member **522**, and the tenth member **528** have substantially the same angular orientation to the longitudinal axis of the stent and the second member **504**, the fourth member **510**, the fifth member **513**, the seventh member **519**, and the ninth member **512** have substantially the same angular orientation to the longitudinal axis of the stent. In the embodiment shown in **FIG. 4**, the lengths of the first, second, third and fourth members **501**, **504**, **507**, **510** are substantially equal. The lengths of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth members **513**, **516**, **519**, **522**, **525**, **528** are also substantially equal. Other embodiments where lengths of individual members are tailored for specific applications, materials of construction or methods of delivery are also possible, and may be preferable for them.

[0042] Preferably, the first, second, third, and fourth members **501**, **504**, **507**, **510** have a width that is greater than the width of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members **513**, **516**, **519**, **522**, **525**, **528** in that cell. The differing widths of the first, second, third, and fourth members and the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members with respect to each other contribute to the overall flexibility and resistance to radial compression of the cell. The widths of the various members can be tailored for specific applications. Preferably, the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members are optimized predominantly to enable longitudinal flexibility, both before and after expansion, while the first, second, third, and fourth members are optimized predominantly to enable sufficient resistance to radial compression to hold a vessel open. Although specific members are optimized to predominantly enable a desired characteristic, all the portions of the cell interactively cooperate and contribute to the characteristics of the stent.

[0043] **FIGS. 5 and 6** show a pattern and an expanded view of one cell of an embodiment of the present invention which is specially adapted for a stent made of stainless steel. The pattern is similar to the pattern of **FIGS. 3 and 4**, and the same reference numerals are used to indicate the generally corresponding parts.

[0044] In this embodiment of the invention, for example, the second loops **531** are made stronger by shortening the third and fourth members **507**, **510**. This helps assure that the second loops do not "flare out" during delivery of the stent through tortuous anatomy. This "flaring out" is not a concern with NiTi stents which are covered by a sheath during delivery.

[0045] Furthermore, the length of the members in this embodiment may be shorter than the length of the corresponding members in the embodiment illustrated in **FIGS. 3 and 4**. Typically, the amount of strain allowed in a self-expanding NiTi stent may be around 10%. In a stainless

steel stent, the amount of strain allowed typically may be 20% or greater. Therefore, to facilitate stents made of NiTi and stents made of stainless steel expanding to comparable diameters, the members of the NiTi stent may be longer than the members of a stainless steel stent.

[0046] FIG. 7 illustrates another aspect of the present invention. The stent of FIG. 7 is also constructed from orthogonal meander patterns 301, 302. The meander patterns form a series of interlocking cells 50, 700 of two types. The first type of cell 50 is taught by U.S. Pat. No. 5,733,303. These cells are arranged so that they form alternating bands 704 of first type of cells 50 and bands 706 of the second type of cells 700.

[0047] As seen in FIG. 8 and particularly with respect to the cell labeled for ease of description, each of the '303 cells 50 has a first longitudinal apex 100 and a second longitudinal end 78. Each cell 50 also is provided with a first longitudinal end 77 and a second longitudinal apex 104 disposed at the second longitudinal end 78. Each cell 50 also includes a first member 51 having a longitudinal component having a first end 52 and a second end 53; a second member 54 having a longitudinal component having a first end 55 and a second end 56; a third member 57 having a longitudinal component having a first end 58 and a second end 59; and a fourth member 60 having a longitudinal component having a first end 61 and a second end 62. The stent also includes a first loop or curved member 63 defining a first angle 64 disposed between the first end 52 of the first member 51 and the first end 55 of the second member 54. A second loop or curved member 65 defining a second angle 66 is disposed between the second end 59 of the third member 57 and the second end 62 of the fourth member 60 and is disposed generally opposite to the first loop 63. A first flexible compensating member (or a section of a longitudinal meander pattern) 67 having curved portion and two legs with a first end 68 and a second end 69 is disposed between the first member 51 and the third member 57 with the first end 68 of the first flexible compensating member 67 joined to and communicating with the second end 53 of the first member 51 and the second end 69 of the first flexible compensating member 67 joined to and communicating with the first end 58 of the third member 57. The first end 68 and the second end 69 are disposed a variable longitudinal distance 70 from each other. A second flexible compensating member (or, a section of a longitudinal meander pattern) 71 having a first end 72 and a second end 73 is disposed between the second member 54 and the fourth member 60. The first end 72 of the second flexible compensating member 71 is joined to and communicates with the second end 56 of the second member 54 and the second end 73 of the second flexible compensating member 71 is joined to and communicates with the first end 61 of the fourth member 60. The first end 72 and the second end 73 are disposed a variable longitudinal distance 74 from each other. In this embodiment, the first and second flexible compensating members, and particularly the curved portion thereof, 67 and 71 are arcuate.

[0048] The second type of cell 700 is illustrated in FIG. 9 and the same reference numerals are used to indicate generally corresponding areas of the cell. The apices 100, 104 of the second type of cell 700 are offset circumferentially. Also, each flexible compensating member 67, 71 includes: a first portion or leg 79 with a first end 80 and a second end

81; a second portion or leg 82 with a first end 83 and a second end 84; and a third portion or leg 85 with the first end 86 and a second end 87, with the second end 81 and the second end 84 being joined by a curved member and the first end 83 and the first end 86 being joined by a curved member. The first end of a flexible compensating member 67, 71 is the same as the first end 80 of the first portion 79, and the second end of a flexible compensating member 67, 71 is the same as the second end 87 of the third portion 85. A first area of inflection 88 is disposed between the second end 81 of the first portion 79 and the second end 84 of the second portion 82 where the curved portion joining them lies. A second area of inflection 89 is disposed between the first end 83 of the second portion 82 and the first end 86 of the third portion 85 where the curved portion joining them lies.

[0049] While FIG. 7 illustrates a pattern of alternating bands of cells, the stent may be optimized for a particular usage by tailoring the configuration of the bands. For example, the middle band of the second type of cells 700 may instead be formed of cells 50, or vice versa. The second type of cells in FIG. 7 may also utilize the cell configurations described with respect to FIGS. 4 and 6. The cell configurations of FIGS. 4 and 6 provide the advantage that they will not cause any torque of one portion of the cell relative to another portion of the cell about the longitudinal axis of the stent upon expansion, which may happen when the second type of cells 700 expand, a torque which could cause a stent to deform, and stick out.

[0050] As illustrated in FIG. 7, all of the flexible compensating members are arranged so that the path of the flexible compensating members, from left to right, travels in a generally downward direction. The cells 700 can also be arranged so that the flexible compensating members in one band are arranged in a generally upward direction, and the flexible compensating members in an adjacent band are arranged in a generally downward direction. One skilled in the art can easily make these modifications.

[0051] FIG. 10 is a schematic representation comparing the cells 804 of the present invention, which have three points where the intertwined first and second meander patterns meet and are in that sense three cornered or triangular cells, with cells 802 of the '303 stent which have four points where the intertwined first and second meander patterns meet and are in that sense four cornered or square cells. More particularly, on the left side of FIG. 10, a pair of vertical meander patterns 806, 826 are joined by members 808, 810, 812 (which are sections of longitudinal meander patterns) to form a plurality of three cornered or triangular cells 804. By triangular cell, it is meant that there are three sections 810, 812, 814, each having loop portions and three associated points 816, 818, 820 of their joining, forming each cell.

[0052] On the right side of FIG. 10, a pair of vertical meander patterns 822, 824 are joined together compensating members 828, 830, 832, 834 (which are sections of a longitudinal meander) to form a plurality of square cells 804. By square cell, it is meant that there are four sections, each having loop portions, and four associated points of their joining, forming each cell. For example, the shaded cell 802 is formed from four sections 832, 836, 830, 838, with four associated points of their joining 840, 842, 844, 846.

[0053] Both the square cell and the triangular cell have two kinds of sections with loops. The first kind of loop

containing section is formed from a vertical meander pattern and is optimized predominantly to enable radial support. The second kind of loop containing section is optimized predominantly to enable flexibility along the longitudinal axis of the stent. Although each loop containing section is optimized predominantly to enable a desired characteristic of the stent, the sections are interconnected and cooperate to define the characteristics of the stent. Therefore, the first kind of loop containing section contributes to the longitudinal flexibility of the stent, and the second kind of loop containing section contributes to the radial support of the stent.

[0054] In the square cell 802, it can be seen that the second kind of loop containing sections 830, 832 each have one inflection point 848, 850. In the triangular cell, the loop containing sections 810, 812 each have two inflection point areas 852, 854, 856, 858. The higher number of inflection points allows more freedom to deform after expansion of the stent and distributes the deformation over a longer section, thus, reducing the maximal strain along these loop containing sections.

[0055] Furthermore, it can be seen that a square cell 802 is generally more elongated along the longitudinal axis of the stent than a triangular cell 804, which is generally more elongated along the circumference of the stent. This also contributes to higher flexibility after expansion.

[0056] If the first meander patterns 806, 822, 824, 826 of both types of cells are constructed identically and spaced apart by the same amount, the area of a triangular cell 804 is the same as a square cell 802. This can be more readily understood with reference to a band of cells around the circumference of a stent. Each band will encompass the same area, and each band will have the same number of cells. Accordingly, the area of each cell in one band formed of square cells will be the same as the area of each cell in another band formed of triangular cells.

[0057] Although the areas of the cells are equal, the perimeter of the triangular cell is larger than the perimeter of the square cell. Therefore, in comparison to a square cell, a triangular cell offers increased coverage of a vessel wall.

[0058] In the particular embodiments described above, the stent is substantially uniform over its entire length. However, other applications where portions of the stent are adapted to provide different characteristics are also possible. For example, as shown in FIG. 11, a band of cells 850 may be designed to provide different flexibility characteristics or different radial compression characteristics than the remaining bands of cells by altering the widths and lengths of the members making up that band. Or, the stent may be adapted to provide increased access to a side branch lumen by providing at least one cell 852 which is larger in size than the remaining cells, or by providing an entire band of cells 854 which are larger in size than the other bands of cells. Or, the stent may be designed to expand to different diameters along the length of the stent. The stent may also be treated after formation of the stent by coating the stent with a medicine, plating the stent with a protective material, plating the stent with a radiopaque material, or covering the stent with a material.

[0059] Thus, what is described is a longitudinally flexible stent that utilizes a closed cell structure to provide excellent

coverage of the vessel wall. The general concepts described herein can be utilized to form stents with different configurations than the particular embodiments described herein. For example, the general concepts can be used to form bifurcated stents. It will be appreciated by persons skilled in the art that the present invention is not limited to what has been particularly shown and described above. Rather, the scope of the present invention is defined by the claims which follow.

What is claimed is:

1. A stent comprising:

a first loop containing section arranged in a circumferential direction and defining loops therein occurring at a first frequency;

a second loop containing section arranged in the circumferential direction and defining loops therein occurring at the first frequency;

a third loop containing section disposed in a generally circumferential space between the first loop containing section and the second loop containing section and coupling the first loop containing section to the second loop containing section for defining cells therebetween, the third loop containing section defining loops therein occurring at a second frequency that is greater than the first frequency.

2. The stent according to claim 1, wherein the first and second loop containing sections are each part of a continuous circumferential member having a plurality of the first and second loop containing sections respectively and the third loop containing section is also part a continuous loop having a plurality of the third loop containing sections coupled to first and second loop containing sections for defining the cells.

3. The stent according to claim 1, wherein the first and second loop containing sections are each part of a continuous circumferential member having a plurality of the first and second loop containing sections respectively and wherein a plurality of the third loop containing sections each having one end connected to one of the first loop containing sections and another end connected to one of the second loop containing sections are provided.

4. The stent according to claim 1, wherein the first loop containing section and the second loop containing section are 180 degrees out of phase with one another.

5. The stent according to claim 2, wherein the first loop containing section and the second loop containing section are 180 degrees out of phase with one another.

6. The stent according to claim 3, wherein the first loop containing section and the second loop containing section are 180 degrees out of phase with one another.

7. The stent according to claim 6, wherein one end of each of the third loop containing sections is connected to a first loop the first loop containing section, and another end of each of the flexible compensating members is connected to a second loop of the second loop containing section, said second loop being circumferentially offset with respect to the first loop.

8. The stent according to claim 7, wherein the third loop containing section has a width than is smaller than a width of the first loop containing section and of the second loop containing section.

9. A stent comprising:

first meander patterns having axes extending in a first direction;

second meander patterns having axes extending in a second direction that is different from the first direction;

wherein the second meander patterns are intertwined with the first meander patterns; and

wherein the second meander patterns have loop portions with at least one loop, each loop portion having one end connected to one of first meander patterns and another end connected to a neighboring one of the first meander patterns such that said one end of said each loop portion is circumferentially offset with respect to said another end of said each loop portion.

10. The stent according to claim 8, wherein each loop portion has at least two loops.

11. The stent according to claim 9, wherein the loop portions of the second meander patterns have a smaller width than the first meander patterns.

12. A stent formed of a tube having a patterned shape, the patterned shape in the expanded and deployed state comprising:

a) first meander patterns, having axes extending in a first direction;

b) second meander patterns having axes extending in a second direction different from said first direction, wherein said second meander patterns are intertwined with said first meander patterns to form a generally uniform distributed structure;

d) wherein said first meander patterns are connected to said second meander patterns so as to leave a portion of said second meander patterns between each first meander pattern;

e) wherein said second meander patterns are connected to said first meander patterns so as to leave loops of said first meander patterns between each pair of second meander patterns; and

f) wherein said second meander patterns have loop portions with at least one loop, each loop portion having

one end connected to one of first meander patterns and another end connected to a neighboring one of the first meander patterns such that said one end of said each loop portion is circumferentially offset with respect to said another end of said each loop portion.

13. A stent according to claim 12 wherein said first meander patterns have loops, and wherein said second meander patterns are connected to said first meander patterns so as to leave one loops of said first meander patterns between each pair of second meander patterns.

14. A stent according to any preceding claim, wherein the first meander patterns comprise even first meander patterns and odd first meander patterns and wherein the odd first meander patterns are 180° out of phase with the even first meander patterns and occur between every two even first meander patterns.

15. A stent comprising:

a. at least odd and even alternating serpentine sections, each having first areas of inflection, wherein said odd serpentine section is out of phase from said even serpentine section such that first areas of inflection on said odd serpentine section are adjacent first areas of inflection on said even serpentine section; and

b. a plurality of flexible connectors, one located between each first area of inflection of one of said odd and even alternating serpentine sections and a first area of inflection of the other of said odd even alternating serpentine sections which is circumferentially offset from said first area of inflection of one of said odd and even alternating serpentine sections, wherein said flexible connector has at least two portions connected by at least one second area of inflection, and wherein said first and second areas of inflection define first and second angles whose bisecting lines are substantially parallel to one another.

16. A stent according to claim 15, wherein said flexible connectors are part of a continuous additional serpentine section.

17. A stent according to claim 15, wherein said flexible connectors are separate elements.

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