



(12) **DEMANDE DE BREVET CANADIEN**
CANADIAN PATENT APPLICATION

(13) **A1**

(86) Date de dépôt PCT/PCT Filing Date: 2018/11/20

(87) Date publication PCT/PCT Publication Date: 2019/05/31

(85) Entrée phase nationale/National Entry: 2020/05/22

(86) N° demande PCT/PCT Application No.: IB 2018/059150

(87) N° publication PCT/PCT Publication No.: 2019/102358

(30) Priorité/Priority: 2017/11/22 (US62/590,084)

(51) Cl.Int./Int.Cl. *A47C 27/06* (2006.01),
F16F 1/37 (2006.01)

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(54) Titre : RESSORT EN MOUSSE BOMBEE A CENTRE TUBULAIRE CREUX

(54) Title: HOLLOW TUBULAR CENTER BULGING FOAM SPRING

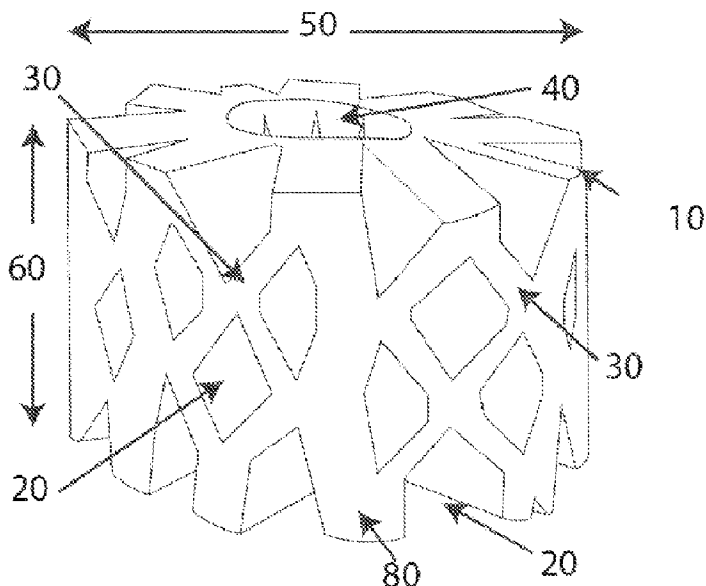


FIG.1

(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**

A hollow tubular foam spring (10) having a plurality of radially extending holes (20) extending from an outer surface (30) towards a central hollow core (40). The tubular foam spring (10) is arranged with wall thickness and diameter to height ratios such that center

(57) **Abrégé(suite)/Abstract(continued):**

bulging is achieved under compressive loads. In an embodiment, such as in a mattress, seat, cushion or pillow, springs (10) are arranged in an array whereby some impinge upon one another due to central bulging.

(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property
Organization
International Bureau

(43) International Publication Date
31 May 2019 (31.05.2019)



(10) International Publication Number
WO 2019/102358 A1

(51) International Patent Classification:

A47C 27/06 (2006.01) F16F 1/37 (2006.01)

(21) International Application Number:

PCT/IB2018/059150

(22) International Filing Date:

20 November 2018 (20.11.2018)

(25) Filing Language:

English

(26) Publication Language:

English

(30) Priority Data:

62/590,084 22 November 2017 (22.11.2017) US

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TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.

(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every
kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH,
GM, KE, LR, LS, MW, MZ, NA, RW, SD, SL, ST, SZ, TZ,
UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, RU, TJ,
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KM, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

(81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every
kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM,

(54) Title: HOLLOW TUBULAR CENTER BULGING FOAM SPRING

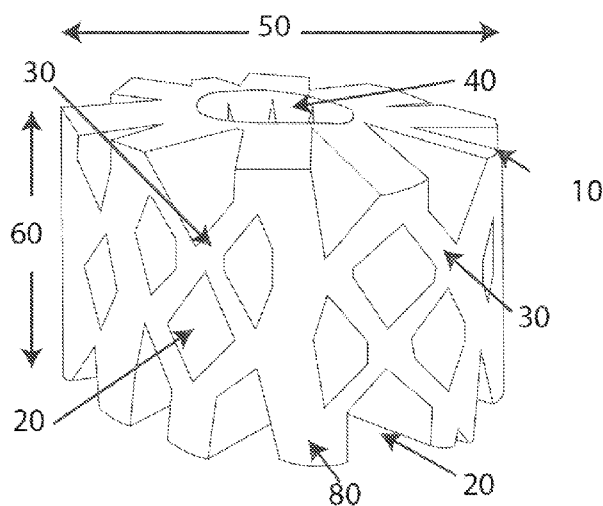


FIG.1

(57) Abstract: A hollow tubular foam spring (10) having a plurality of radially extending holes (20) extending from an outer surface (30) towards a central hollow core (40). The tubular foam spring (10) is arranged with wall thickness and diameter to height ratios such that center bulging is achieved under compressive loads. In an embodiment, such as in a mattress, seat, cushion or pillow, springs (10) are arranged in an array whereby some impinge upon one another due to central bulging.

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WO 2019/102358 A1

WO 2019/102358 A1

Published:

- *with international search report (Art. 21(3))*
- *in black and white; the international application as filed contained color or greyscale and is available for download from PATENTSCOPE*

HOLLOW TUBULAR CENTER BULGING FOAM SPRING

[0001] This application has priority to United States Patent Application No. 62/590,084, filed November 22, 2017 and titled, "Hollow Tubular Center Bulging Foam Spring", which is referred to and incorporated herein in its entirety.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The invention relates to generally cylindrical foam based springs such as used in cushions, pillows, mattresses, and seats.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] A variety of hollow core foam based springs such as for use in cushions, pillows, seats, mattresses, and the like are known. Foam springs having a generally tubular shape with plural slits or holes extending inwards from an outer surface also are known.

[0004] One example of such hollow core cylindrical foam based springs is found in Pope U.S. Patent No. 4,194,255 and Poppe U.S. Published Application No. US 2009/0079119A1. In that example, generally laterally uniform holes extending inward are illustrated in which the holes form a laterally extending diamond shape. One disadvantage of such a construction is bulging that occurs when vertical (i.e. axial) compression is applied typically causes lateral (sideways) dislocation or collapse. A disadvantage of such lateral or sideways bulging is that the springs either need to be spaced apart when positioned in a spring bed (such as in a cushion, pillow, mattress, seat or the like), or if more closely packed, may impinge upon one another under compressive loads. Another disadvantage of this spring construction is a tendency at rest for the top and bottom edges to bulge out radially, and relative difficulty in manufacture in gluing opposite ends of a cut foam strip to form the cylindrical spring.

[0005] Another example of hollow core cylindrical foam based spring is found in Poppe U.S. Patent No. 8,353,501 B2. In that example, a pattern of half diamond, and full laterally extended diamond shaped holes is illustrated, with the holes separated by a spacer column. Such foam based springs are understood to exhibit a greater compression resistance (i.e. higher spring constant) as compared to those illustrated in the examples discussed above. However, they also are understood to require additional foam material as used in the spacer columns. A further disadvantage of these foam springs is lateral (sideways) dislocation or collapse upon application of axial loads. Another disadvantage is a relatively low height to diameter ratio, also limiting the packing density in a spring bed.

[0006] Accordingly, there is a need for a hollow core generally cylindrical foam based spring having an elongated hole pattern promoting center bulging upon axial loads, ease of fabrication in maintaining glued seam integrity, while reducing sideways collapse upon application of axial loads.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] The present invention relates to foam springs such as used in cushions, pillows, mattresses, seats and the like having holes extending from an exterior surface towards an inner hollow core of the spring. The spring has achieves a desired diameter to height ratio while promoting center bulging, which in some embodiments utilizes reduced interior wall thicknesses compared to know springs, producing a surprising result of increased compressive load resistance (i.e. higher spring constant) due to concentration of bulging displacements in the middle of the spring. An advantage off such a bulge profile is that the springs tend to maintain an axially sound (i.e. upright for vertically oriented springs) positioning, with the bulging of individual springs directed towards adjacent springs. In some embodiments, when packed in an array, the bulges of interior springs impinge upon those of adjacent springs imparting slip resistance and improved axial compression resistance. Likewise, springs can achieve having a relatively high height to diameter ratio while maintaining structural soundness.

[0008] In a further embodiment of the present invention a center bulging foam material spring is provided. Upon the application of a compressive force (i.e. axial direction), a spring in accordance with the present invention bulges radially outwards in its center portion (i.e. in the region about the middle of its vertical or axial direction). When packed in an array with other springs in accordance with the present invention, adjacent springs bulge outwards and optionally impinge upon one another, providing enhanced resistance to axial compression. In an embodiment in which the springs are positioned in an array in a mattress, for example, the springs provide enhanced support. A further advantage of the present invention is that the increased compression resistance allows for thinner walls and reduced material use to produce the spring, while still providing a similar compression resistance as bulkier springs.

[0009] These and other embodiments of the invention are described in the description and figures that follow. This summary and the following detailed description are merely exemplary, illustrative, and explanatory, and are not intended to limit, but to provide further explanation of

the invention as claimed. Other systems, methods, features, and advantages of the example embodiments will be or will become apparent to one skilled in the art upon examination of the following figures and detailed description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0010] The details of the subject matter set forth herein, both as to its structure and operation, may be apparent by study of the accompanying figures, in which like reference numerals refer to like parts. The components in the figures are not necessarily to scale, emphasis instead being placed upon illustrating the principles of the subject matter. Moreover, all illustrations are intended to convey concepts, where relative sizes, shapes and other detailed attributes may be illustrated schematically rather than literally or precisely. Illustrated in the accompanying drawing(s) is at least one of the best mode embodiments of the present invention.

[0011] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a hollow tubular foam spring in accordance with the invention;

[0012] FIG. 2 is a side view of a hollow tubular foam spring in accordance with the invention;

[0013] FIG. 3 is a side view of an array of prior art springs being compressed and exhibiting sideways slippage;

[0014] FIG. 4 is a side view of a test apparatus with an array of prior art springs being compressed and exhibiting sideways slippage;

[0015] FIG. 5 is a side view of a hollow tubular spring in accordance with the invention under an axial (vertical) load and exhibiting center bulging in accordance with the invention;

[0016] FIG. 6 is a side view of an array of hollow tubular springs in accordance with the invention being compressed and exhibiting center bulging in accordance with the invention;

[0017] FIG. 7 is a side view of a test apparatus with an array of hollow tubular springs in accordance with the invention being compressed and exhibiting center bulging in accordance with the invention;

[0018] FIG. 8 is a perspective view of a mattress in accordance with the invention;

[0019] FIG. 9 is a top cross-sectional view of a mattress in accordance with the invention;

[0020] FIG. 10 is a side cross-sectional view of a mattress in accordance with the invention;

[0021] FIG. 11 is a side perspective vertically exploded view of a mattress in accordance with the invention;

[0022] FIG. 12 is a side cross sectional view of a mattress in accordance with the invention; and
[0023] FIG. 13 is a side perspective view with a cutaway section of a pillow in accordance with the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0024] Before the present subject matter is described in detail, it is to be understood that this disclosure is not limited to the particular embodiments described, as such may vary. It should also be understood that the terminology used herein is to describing particular embodiments only, and is not intended to be limiting, since the scope of the present disclosure will be limited only by the appended claims. While this invention is susceptible to different embodiments in different forms, there is shown in the drawings and will here be described in detail a preferred embodiment of the invention with the understanding that the present disclosure is to be considered as an exemplification of the principles of the invention and is not intended to limit the broad aspect of the invention to the embodiment illustrated. All features, elements, components, functions, and steps described with respect to any embodiment provided herein are intended to be freely combinable and substitutable with those from any other embodiment unless otherwise stated. Therefore, it should be understood that what is illustrated is set forth only for the purposes of example and should not be taken as a limitation on the scope of the present invention.

[0025] In the following description and in the figures, like elements are identified with like reference numerals. The use of “e.g.,” “etc.,” “or” and “the like” indicates non-exclusive alternatives without limitation, unless otherwise noted. The use of “having”, “comprising”, “including” or “includes” means “including, but not limited to,” or “includes, but not limited to,” unless otherwise noted.

[0026] As used herein, the term “and/or” placed between a first entity and a second entity means one of (1) the first entity, (2) the second entity, and (3) the first entity and the second entity. Multiple entities listed with “and/or” should be construed in the same manner, i.e., “one or more” of the entities so conjoined. Other entities may optionally be present other than the entities specifically identified by the “and/or” clause, whether related or unrelated to those entities specifically identified. Thus, as a non-limiting example, a reference to “A and/or B,” when used in conjunction with open-ended language such as “comprising” can refer, in one embodiment, to A only (optionally including entities other than B); in another embodiment, to B only (optionally

including entities other than A); in yet another embodiment, to both A and B (optionally including other entities). These entities may refer to elements, actions, structures, steps, operations, values, and the like.

[0027] Turning to the figures, FIGS. 1 and 2 illustrate an example of a foam spring 10 of the present invention. The foam spring 10 has a generally hollow tubular shaped body with a plurality of holes 20 formed within. The holes extend from an exterior surface 30 of the spring 10 radially inwards towards the center of the spring 10. A hollow central core 40 is provided, although it is understood that in some embodiments a core 40 may not be provided. The holes 30 may be formed by any technique. Examples of suitable techniques are material removal from a solid cylinder, and forming axial cuts in a foam strip and then bending the strip to connect its respective ends forming the hollow cylinder shape. The diameter of the spring 10 in a relaxed state is illustrated with reference number 50 and the height of the spring 10 in the relaxed state is illustrated with reference number 60. It has been found that the punctured cylindrical foam springs 10 have maintained the desired center bulging property at diameter to height ratios well under 4:3 (diameter:height), and not achieved with prior springs tested. However, it should be understood that any height to width ratio of the spring may be selected in which, upon the application of compressive force, the spring bulges in its vertical center region and avoids lateral slippage.

[0028] To fabricate the spring, a foam strip is provided and through slits are cut in it. Opposite ends of the foam strip are attached causing the cut slits to open on the outside, forming holes 20, extending from the exterior surface of the spring 10 inwards towards the core 40. The slit length is selected such that desired center bulging of the spring 10 upon compression is achieved.

[0029] Various springs of the present invention and prior known springs were tested to determine whether the desired center bulging (as opposed to slippage) are achieved. In one example using the prior spring as illustrated in FIGS. 3 and 4, it was found that the bulb effect due to inner spring forces was relatively small, so the spring tended to slip laterally, or collapse to one side if the diameter to height ratio was greater than 4:3. As illustrated in FIG. 3, the tested prior art springs 100 are illustrated to bow out in a first radial direction X, without a similar bow outwards on the opposing surface. In FIG. 4, an experimental arrangement is shown in which springs 100 were compressed and the slippage illustrated in FIG. 3 was observed.

[0030] An example of the present invention showing the middle bulge desired is illustrated in FIGS. 5-7. In FIG. 5, a spring 10 in accordance with the present invention, is shown under axial

compression. A compressive force 200 is applied downward to the top 70 of the spring. The opposing force on the bottom 80 of the spring 10 of the ground in direction 210 is also illustrated. In this example the spring bulges to the side in both directions, as illustrated with reference indicators X and X'. In the illustration direction X is shown to the left, and X' to the right, but it should be understood that the bulge may be fully around the spring in or about its center. An array of springs 10 is illustrated in FIGS. 6 and 7, such as positioned within a cushion, seat, pillow or mattress 300 optionally having a sheet layers 302, 303 adjacent the respective top sides 70 and bottom sides 80 of the foam springs 10, respectively, in which compressive forces are applied in the axial direction (illustrated with reference numbers 200 and 210 and corresponding arrows) on the springs 10 positioned within the mattress 300, such as by example applying a first force 200 (such as in an axial direction) via optional foam layer 302 and an opposing second force 210 via optional layer 303. It is seen that for each spring bulging at or near the center line 220 is achieved, in the X directions illustrated with X and X' and corresponding arrows. For adjacent springs the opposing forces in the bulging in the X directions are shown to impinge upon the bulging in the X' directions, with adjacent springs providing structural support to one another.

[0031] An example of a mattress 300 in accordance with the invention is illustrated in FIG. 8. In the mattress 300, foam springs 100 in accordance with the invention may be positioned in an array, such as illustrated in FIGS. 4 and 6 in the interior of the mattress. A top cross-sectional view of such an array is illustrated in FIG. 9. As illustrated in FIG. 9, a foam springs 100 are positioned in an interior space 305 of the mattress 300, in any desired arrangement. Likewise plural layers of springs 100 can be provided in the interior space 305. Optionally an edge structure 310 or optional interior spacers 320 are provided, providing further alignment for the springs 100. Any number or arrangement of additional supports or spacers 310, 320 may be provided such that the mattress 300 may achieve desired structural characteristics.

[0032] In an alternative embodiment of mattress 300, elongated foam springs 100 are positioned extending laterally or longitudinally within the mattress wherein the top sides of the springs 100 are oriented laterally within the mattress, rather than vertically, as illustrated in FIGS. 2, 6 and 9. Examples in accordance with the present invention of mattresses with laterally (widthwise) extending springs are illustrated in FIGS. 10 and 11. In this embodiment, the springs 100 are elongated and positioned on their sides. The springs are mounted within the mattress on mounting structures 320, 330, although any structure can be used that will retain the springs 100 in a desired

position within the mattress. In the illustrated embodiments, structures 320 and 330 include a memory foam or a polyurethane foam, and include longitudinally extending receiving slots 325, 335 shaped to receive and retain the springs 100. Optional additional top and bottom layers 310, 315 and 340 are also provided. Layers 310 and 315 are positioned above the retaining structure 320 in this example, and layer 340 is below retaining structure 330. However, it should be understood that any arrangement of layers may be provided.

[0033] It should be recognized that any arrangement of the elongated spring 100 of the present invention may be used, such as, for example, arranging the elongated springs longitudinally within the mattress 300, or arranging the elongated springs both longitudinally and laterally within the mattress, as illustrated in FIG. 12. For the sake of clarity, in FIG. 12 the elongated springs 100 are illustrated with reference numbers 100 and 105. In this embodiment as illustrated in FIG. 12, elongated springs 105 are positioned longitudinally within the mattress, seat or cushion 400, and the laterally positioned elongated springs are illustrated with reference numbers 100.

[0034] A pillow 500 embodiment of the invention is illustrated in FIG. 13. In this embodiment the springs 100 of the present invention are positioned within the interior of the pillow 500. Any arrangement of springs 100 may be used that provides a desired firmness and other characteristics of the pillow 500. In one example, springs 100 are positioned laterally within the pillow 500, wherein the compressive forces 200 and 210 act on the long sides of the springs 100. In alternative embodiments, the springs are positioned within a pillow vertically, such as in the arrangement illustrated in FIG. 7 where the compressive forces 200 and 210 act in an axial direction on the springs.

[0035] While the embodiments are susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specific examples thereof have been shown in the drawings and are herein described in detail. It should be understood, however, that these embodiments are not to be limited to the particular form disclosed, but to the contrary, these embodiments are to cover all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit of the disclosure. Furthermore, any features, functions, steps, or elements of the embodiments may be recited in or added to the claims, as well as negative limitations that define the inventive scope of the claims by features, functions, steps, or elements that are not within that scope.

What is claimed is:

1. A hollow tubular spring comprising:

a punctured foam strip attached at opposing ends using an adhesive, forming a hollow tubular shape;

a plurality of holes extending from an outer surface of the spring towards an inner core;

a wall separating the plurality of holes from one another; and

a first wall having a width selected to enable lateral buckling of the spring at or about a vertical mid area of the spring.
2. A mattress, seat, cushion or pillow including a plurality of the hollow tubular springs as set forth in claim 1 arranged within an array in a core area of the mattress, seat, cushion or pillow.
3. The mattress of claim 2 wherein when under a downward compression over the array, at least two of the plurality of tubular springs arranged within the array bulge radially outwards, and impinge upon one another.
4. The mattress of claim 3 wherein the impingement of the adjacent tubular springs upon each other when bulging provides additional compression resistance for each spring.
5. The mattress of claim 3 wherein the impingement of adjacent tubular springs upon each other when bulging maintains the springs in a position in relation to each other.
6. An array of a plurality of the hollow tubular springs as set forth in claim 1.
7. The array of claim 6 wherein when application of a compressive force over the array, at least two of the plurality of tubular springs arranged within the array bulge radially outwards, and impinge upon one another.
8. The array of claim 7 wherein the impingement of the adjacent tubular springs upon each other when bulging provides additional compression resistance for each spring.
9. The array of claim 7 wherein the impingement of adjacent tubular springs upon each other when bulging maintains the springs in a position in relation to each other.

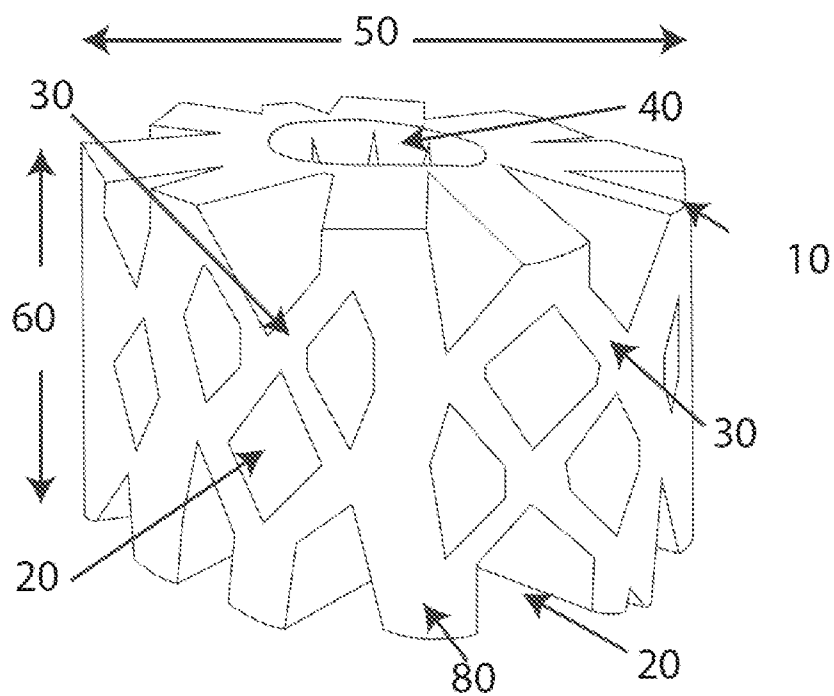


FIG.1

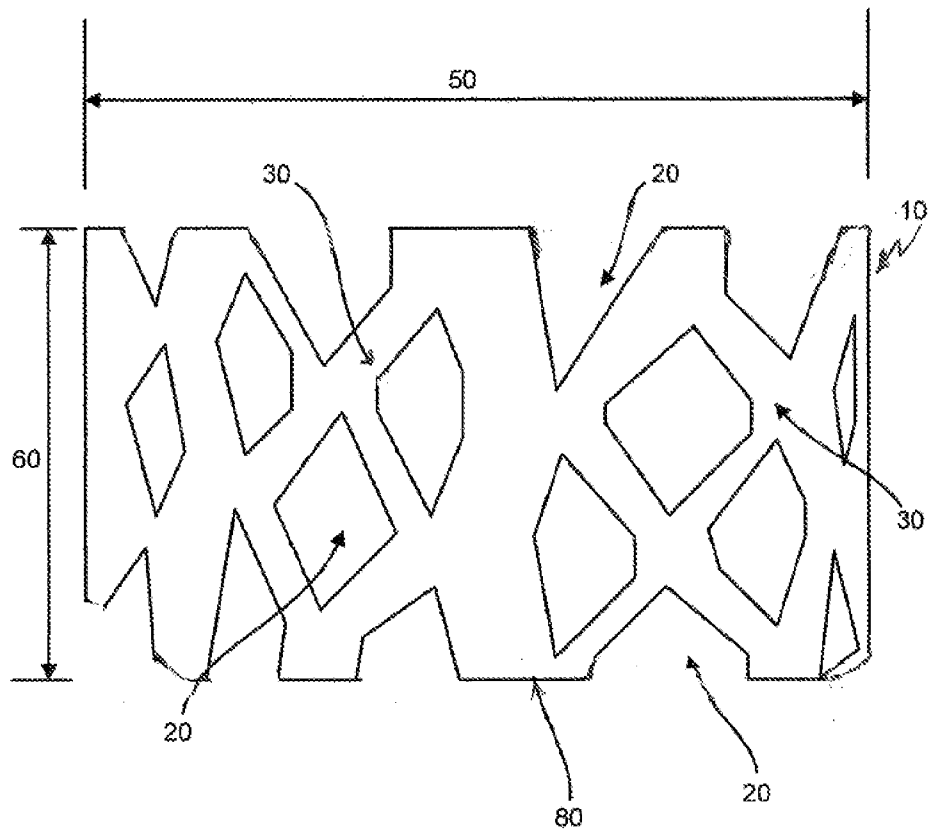


FIG. 2

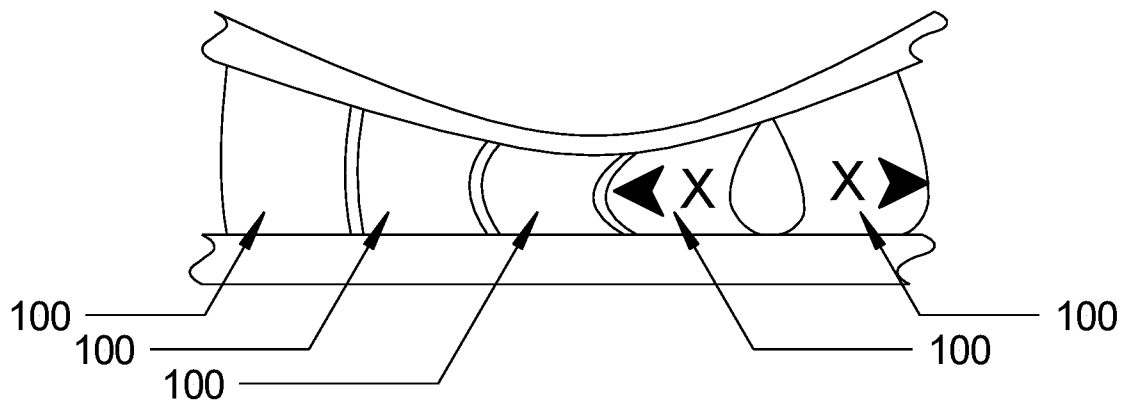


FIG. 3

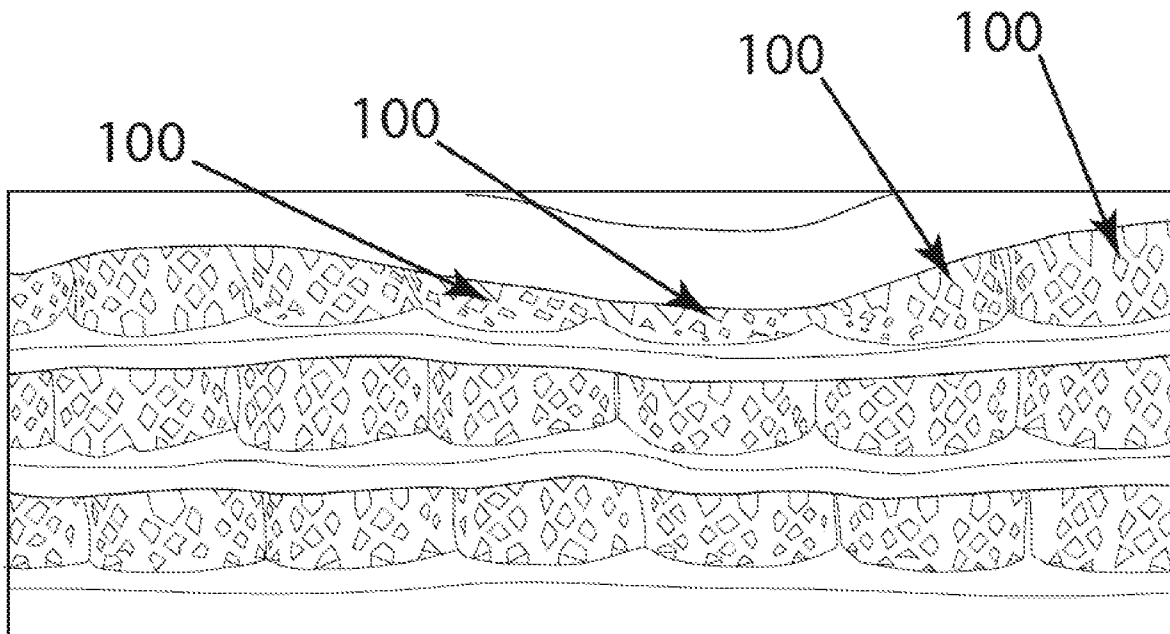


FIG. 4

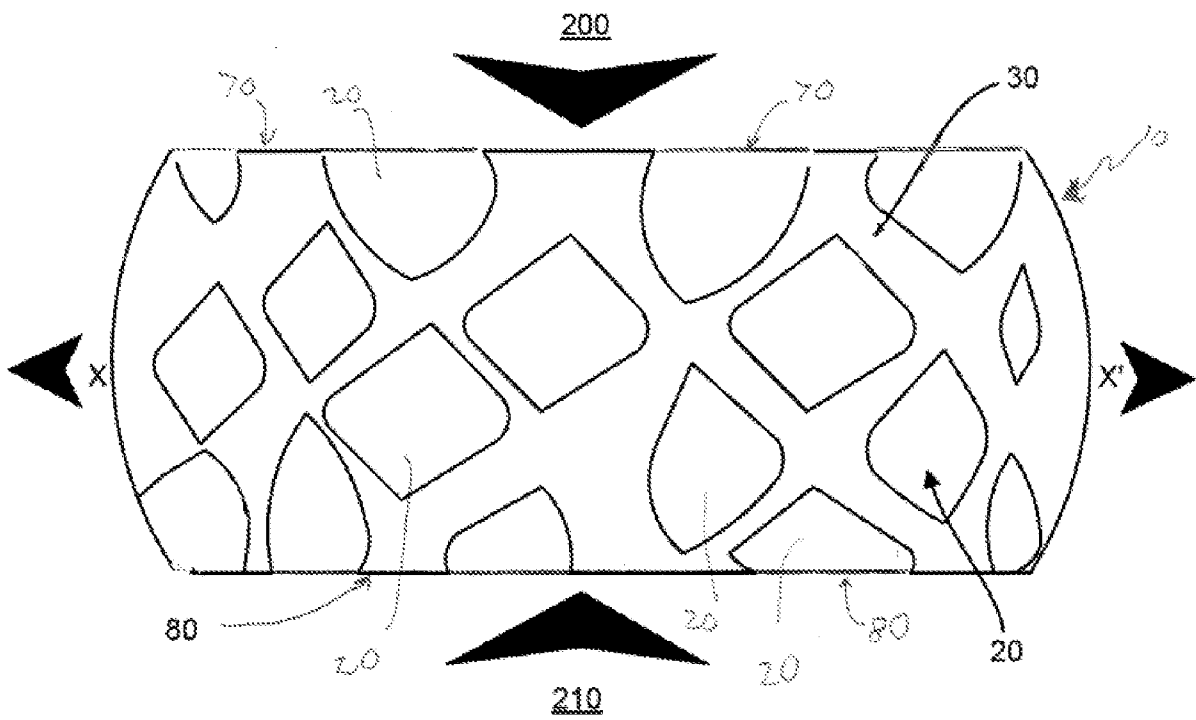


FIG. 5

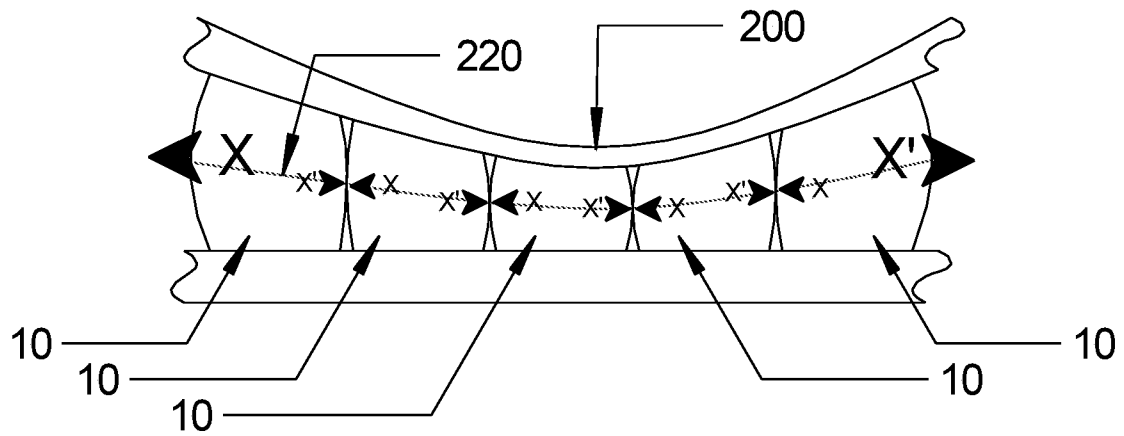


FIG. 6

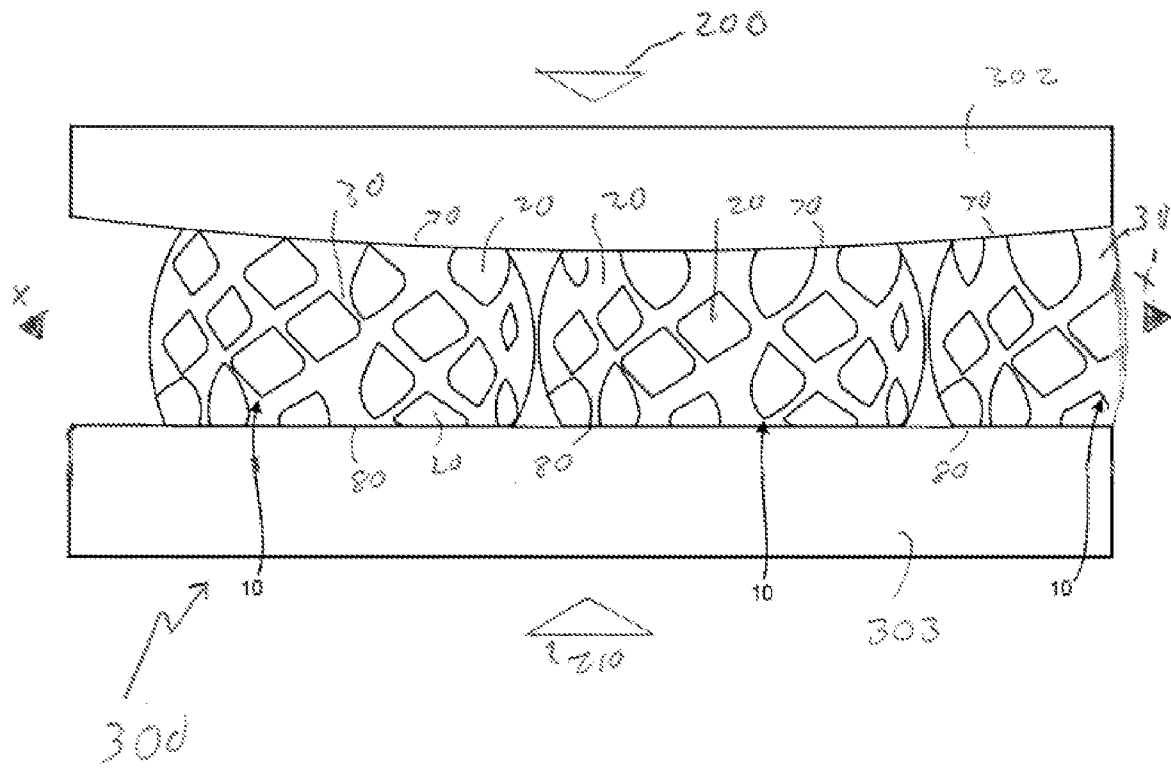


FIG. 7

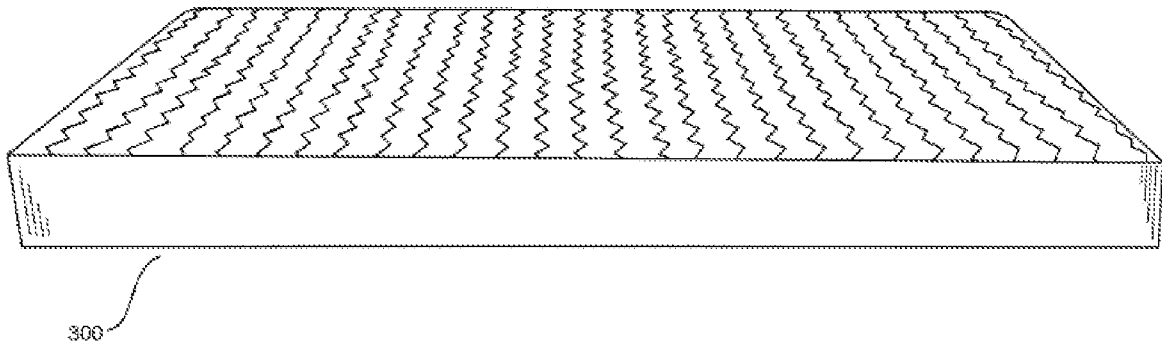


FIG. 8

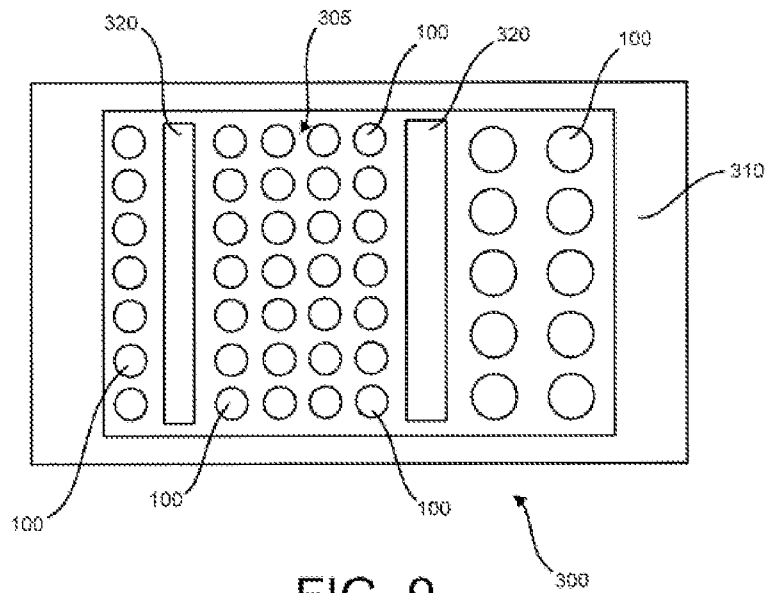


FIG. 9

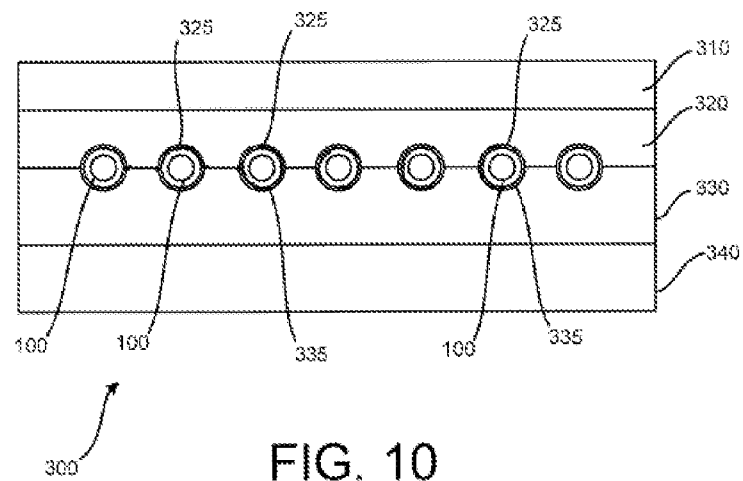


FIG. 10

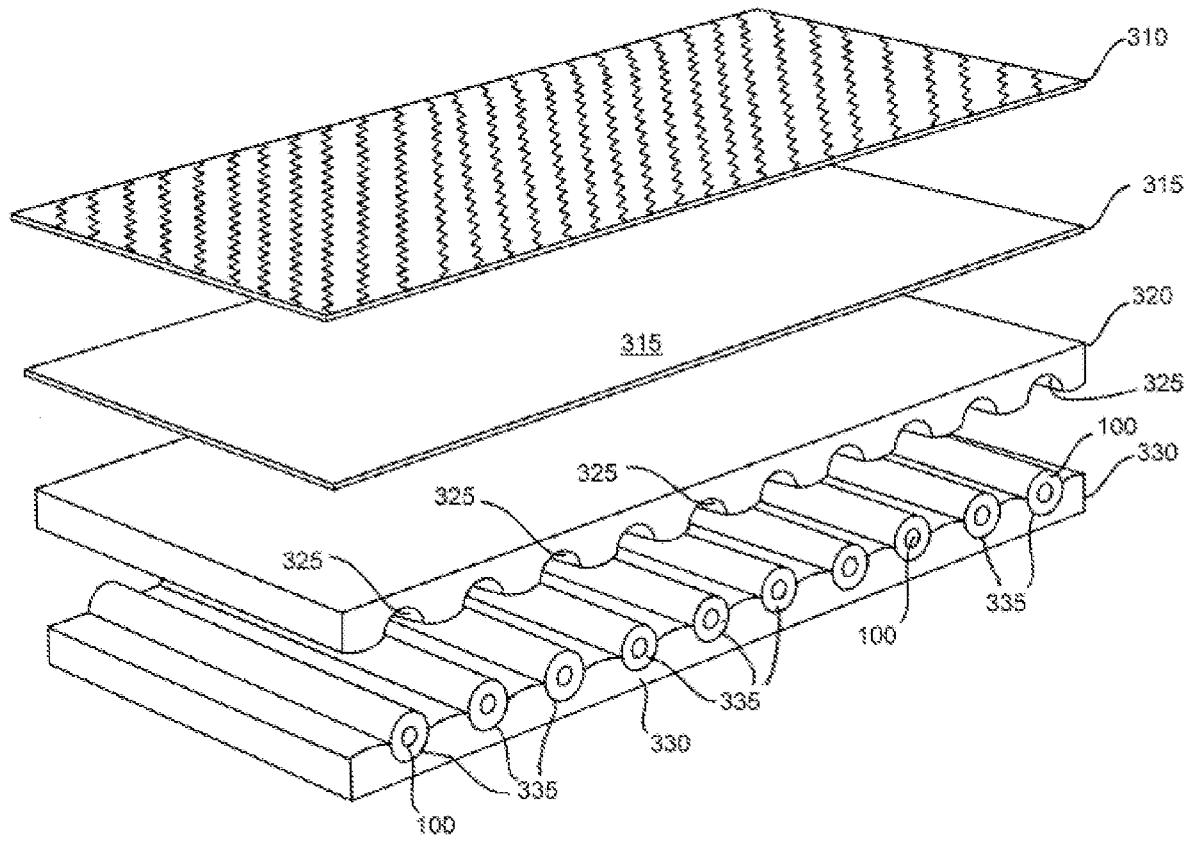


FIG. 11

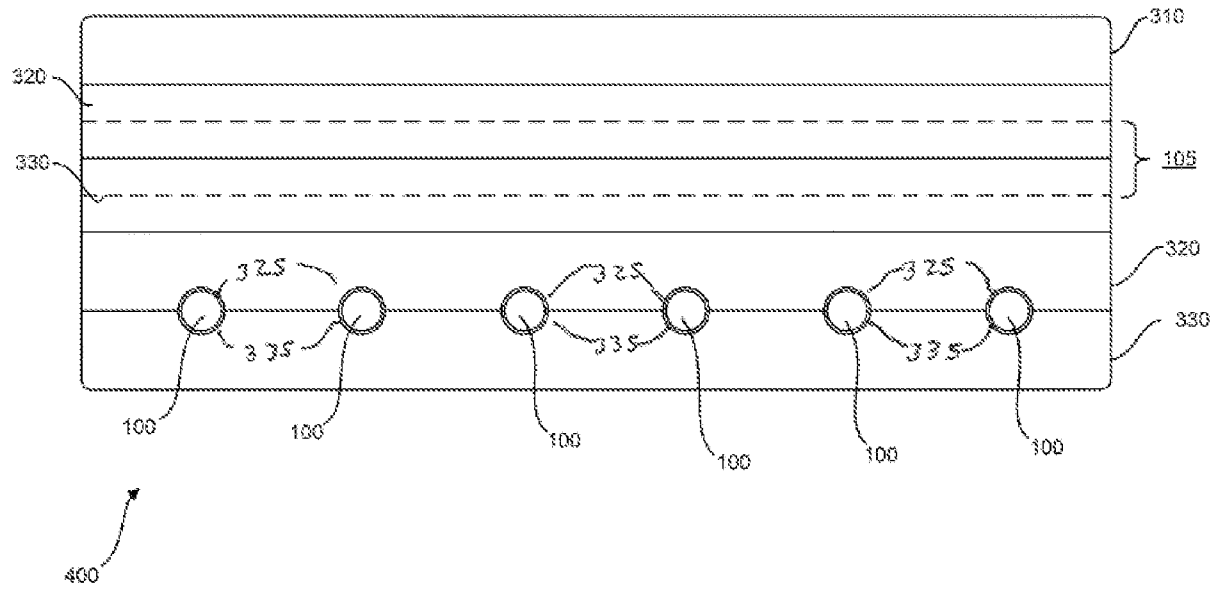


FIG. 12

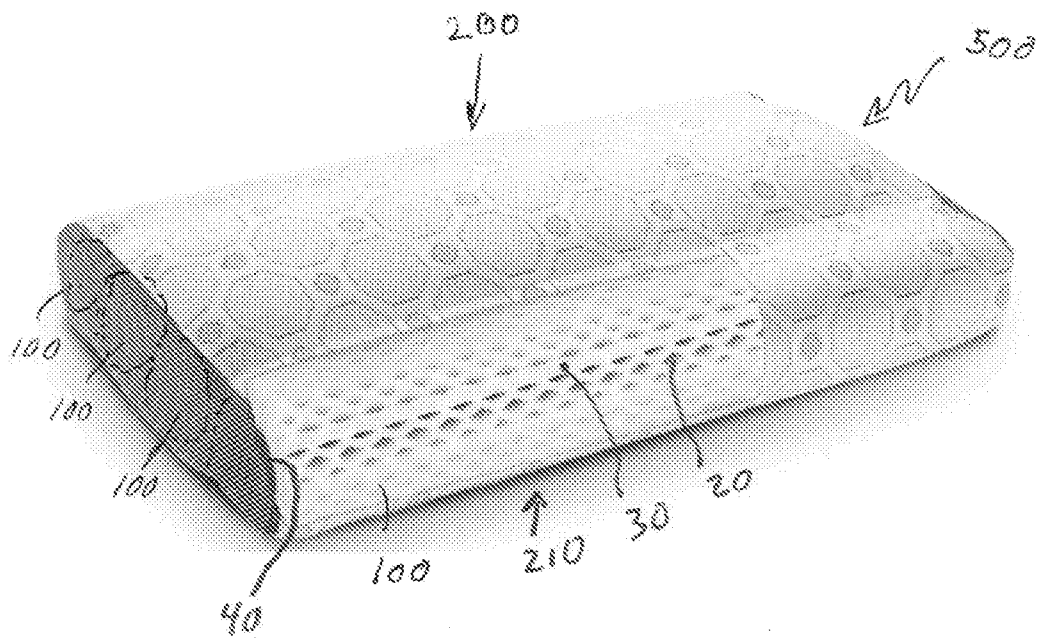


FIG. 13

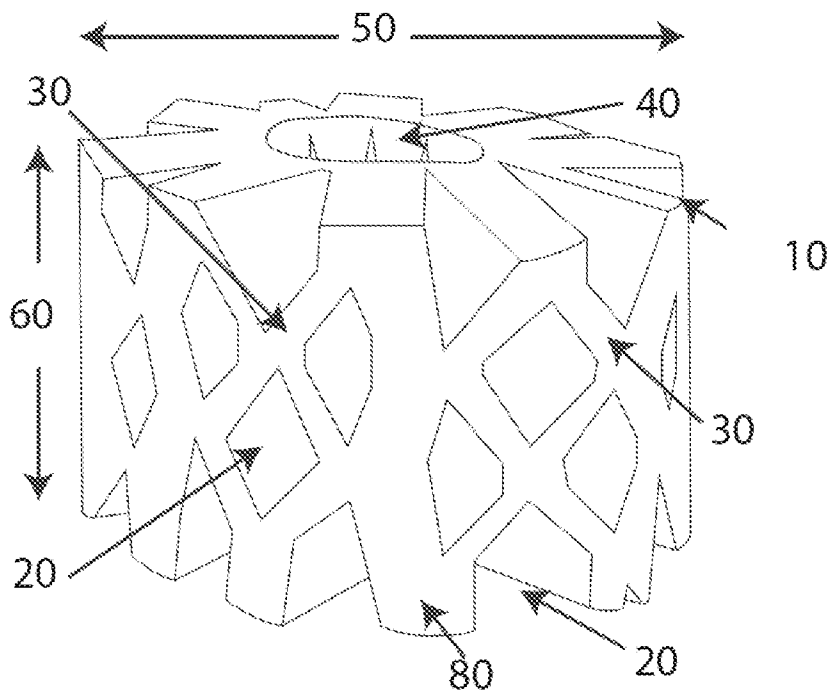


FIG.1