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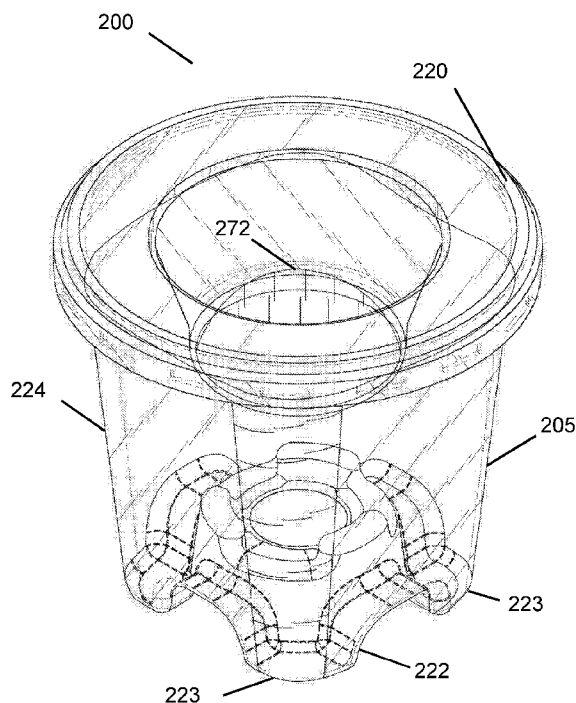


Figure 5

(57) Abstract: A container (100; 200; 400) for storing an
egg (110) for transport and for reheating an egg is disclosed.
In particular, a container (100; 200; 400) comprising: a
chamber (130; 230; 430) for receiving an egg (110) to be re-
heated by hot water and a support (115; 248; 415) to hold
the egg in the chamber. In use, the support (115; 248; 415)
allows hot water placed within the chamber (130; 230; 430);
to surround the bottom of the egg. This ensures a substantive
even reheating of the egg, without cold areas.



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A CONTAINER FOR HOLDING AN EGG

The present invention relates to a container for holding and reheating an egg. In particular, to a container comprising a chamber and a support to allow even and
5 consistent reheating of a pre-processed in shell soft boiled egg.

Recent years has seen an explosion in the number and variety of convenience foods available to consumers. These include noodle based products and porridge based products where a consumer need only add boiling hot water to the contents of a
10 container to create a hot eating meal. Conventionally these products are made from dry or dehydrated products that are simply placed in the bottom of the container by the manufacturer. The ingredients are physically robust and require no particular protection from damage during storage and transportation.

15 We have developed a precooked in-shell soft-boiled egg that is suitable for the ready to eat convenience market. However, such eggs are not suited to conventional known containers used for noodles and the like, because the egg is a fragile item it needs to be protected against impact during all stages of storage and transportation right up until the point of use by the customer. This invention provides either physical
20 cushioning or holds the egg in a position that prevents any impact with other surfaces and therefore eliminates the risk of breakage of the egg. The egg is heated up by filling the container with hot water and allowing it to stand for at least 5 minutes creating and convenient snack or meal.

25 Additionally, many known convenience food containers additionally contain disposable cutlery and seasonings that are used to eat and to add to the contents of the container. However, conventional disposable cutlery is unsuitable for an in shell soft boiled egg.

30 An aim of the invention is to provide an alternative product for packaging in shell soft boiled eggs so that they may be reheated within the packaging and the packaging used to assist with eating.

According to a first aspect of the present invention there is provided a container for
35 storing an egg for transport and for reheating an egg, the container comprising: a

chamber for receiving an egg to be reheated by hot water; a support to hold the egg in the chamber wherein the support allows hot water placed within the chamber to surround the bottom of the egg

- 5 Preferably the support is provided at the base of the chamber. Additionally, the support holds the egg substantially in the centre of the chamber.

It is important to allow hot water, such as boiling hot water from a kettle, typically at 90 – 100 °C and more typically at 95 °C, to completely surround the bottom of the egg
10 to ensure even heating of the egg. Advantageously, the egg is a pasteurised in shell soft-boiled egg. Such eggs may have been previously processed according to the applicant's co-pending patent application "Improvements in and relating to methods for making in-shell soft boiled eggs, and apparatus for doing so", filed on the same day as this application.

15

If the egg is not supported or cushioned in the pot the shell is likely to become cracked or damaged due to movement and impacts in the pot.

It has been appreciated that in order to allow hot water placed within the chamber to
20 surround the egg, one or more openings can be provided in the support to allow hot water to pass from a first side of the support to a second side of the support releasing entrapped air bubbles.

Preferably, the support can hold the bottom of the egg via a contact surface in a
25 manner akin to a conventional egg-cup. The one or more openings may be provided in the contact surface. This presents a discontinuous contact between the support and the egg, allowing water to flow between the openings through the support, to surround the bottom of the egg, ensuring that the temperature of the water below the egg is approximately equivalent to the temperature of the water throughout the chamber and
30 by extension the water in contact with other portions of the egg. This ensures a constant, even warming of the egg at all points of contact between the egg and the water.

Advantageously, the egg is held substantially in the centre of the chamber. This aids
35 in ensuring an even distribution of heating water around the egg. Additionally, having

the egg in the centre of the chamber increases the aesthetic appeal of the product for consumers.

5 Embodiments of the container further comprise a lid to enclose the chamber. The lid may provide a water-tight seal for the container or it may not be water-tight. Additionally the lid may be shaped to support a top portion of the egg to restrict movement of the egg within the chamber.

10 Most advantageously and importantly, the lid and the support cooperate to resiliently clamp the egg. This is particularly important at all stages of storage and transportation in it prevents the fragile egg from being broken or damaged at any stage as it prevents the egg moving around in the packaging.

15 After hot water has been added to the container to re-heat the egg it ensures that the egg remains centred within the container. Additionally, it can be appreciated that the support of the top portion of the egg by the lid may be loose enough to allow hot water to flow around and surround the top portion of the egg, which again aids even heating of the egg by the hot water.

20 One feature of the lid is that in many embodiments it can be removed from the container and used as an egg cup. This may be achieved by upturning the lid so that the part of the lid adapted to support the top portion of the egg is used to support the bottom portion of the egg.

25 In embodiments, the lid comprises openings for filling the chamber with hot water. These openings may be provided in the portion of the lid that supports the top portion of an egg. The openings advantageously allow hot water to enter and fill the chamber whilst the lid is secured to the container. This reduces the risk of spillage of the hot water caused by reattaching the lid to the container. The openings may also be used to
30 remove the water from the container once the egg has been reheated by inverting the container to allow the water within the chamber to flow out prior to removing the egg for eating.

If desired it is possible to make the support and the lid from the same forming tool. .
35 This reduces the overall cost of manufacture of the device. In embodiments, the lid

and support differ in that the support has a cutaway section punched out in the region where it supports the egg. This section forms the contact surface.

5 The lid, or container/chamber, or support, or any or all of them, may be made of transparent, translucent or opaque material. The container is filled with hot water so that the top of the egg is just covered with water. Alternatively the transparent or translucent container may be wrapped in an outer sleeve which is reverse printed with a line that indicates the water fill level.

10 Elements of the container are preferably made from heat resistant plastic, such as polypropylene. In particular, the lid, support and chamber are preferably made from such materials.

Condiments, such as salt, pepper, spices or other such food stuffs may be provided
15 with the container. Accompanying food products such as tea and coffee may also be provided. These may be provided in a recess within the lid. The recess may be downwardly extending and provided in its upper surface, which recess can be used to accommodate such accompanying items. In such cases, it can be envisaged that a cover for the lid is used during packaging and sale of the container to contain the
20 condiments within the recess by sealing/closing the recess in the upper surface of the lid. Alternatively, the container may have an additional chamber, for example provided at its base, beneath the base wall, and that additional chamber may include such a dish with items. The items may be sealed in the additional chamber by a removable/breakable membrane or bottom lid.

25

The condiments and accompanying food products may also or alternatively be contained within the container, along with cutlery. To facilitate this, the volume of the chamber is preferably at least twice the volume of the egg to provide sufficient space within the chamber. Providing a chamber of this size also ensures that
30 sufficient heat can be transferred from the hot water to the egg to ensure that the egg is heated by a sufficient amount prior to eating.

One example of cutlery that could be supplied either within the recess of the lid, within the chamber or separately, is a tool for opening the shell of the egg. In
35 embodiments, the tool comprises a spoon. Adaptations to the spoon may be made, to

assist in the eating and preparation process. For example, the handle of the spoon may comprise a tooth for cracking the shell of an egg. The tooth can be generally saw-toothed shaped to pierce the egg along the top portion, allowing the shell of the egg to be removed prior to eating in the conventional manner. One or more teeth may be provided. The spoon may be made of plastic or other suitable hard material.

Other alterations to the provided tool, such as a spoon, may include modifying the handle of a spoon to comprise a flattened or widened edge on the opposite side to the tooth to facilitate application of pressure by user. This aids the user and minimises any discomfort from using the tool by distributing the pressure applied by the user to pierce the egg shell over a greater area of the users hand/finger/thumb. Additionally or alternatively, a ring, textured surface or other means to allow an even application of force to the tooth for cracking the egg may be used. The ring can be located within the handle of the spoon to assist in gripping of the spoon and in the application of pressure or force by the user of the tooth to crack the egg.

The tooth of the tool may be provided in a concave cutaway on the handle. Additionally, the curvature of the concave cutaway may be designed to substantially corresponds to the average curvature of the egg typically supplied with the product (which is generally of a standardised shape and weight) to allow the cutaway to receive the egg after the tooth has cracked the shell.

The volume of water is important in terms of the rate at which the egg reheats and the time and temperature at which the egg and water equilibrate. It is desirable that the consumer has to wait no longer than 5 minutes for the egg to reheat so it is preferred to have as a minimum ratio of 4 parts water to one egg. Less water would take longer to reheat the egg whilst more water would increase the reheating time but risk over heating and setting the yolk. Typically 200 to 250 ml of water is needed for an egg weighing 55g to 60g to be reheated in 5 minutes

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According to a second aspect of the present invention, there is provided a packaged soft boiled egg comprising a pre-cooked soft boiled egg provided inside a container, the container having a volume sufficiently large that when filled or part-filled with hot water at about 95 °C the yolk of the soft boiled egg reaches a temperature of approximately 35°C to 40°C 5 minutes after the water has been added. Preferably the

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soft boiled pre-cooked egg is at 5 °C to 8°C. The hot water may also be within a range of 80 °C to 100 °C, possibly about 80°C , or about 85°C, or about 90°C. Typically the volume of the container is 4 to 5 times the volume of the egg. Furthermore, if the in shell soft boiled egg is allowed to stand for 10 mins in the water the yolk will continue to rise in temperature to 50°C to 60°C and remain runny provided the yolk temperature does not exceed 65°C. The pre-cooked soft boiled egg may also be supplied in a bag, such as an air-tight plastic bag. The egg may be packaged in the bag with a reduced oxygen environment around the egg (eg vacuum packaged or inert gas, such as Nitrogen or Carbon Dioxide packaged) or by sealing the porous surface of the egg with some form of lacquer or impervious film.

The container may also additionally comprise a lid to enclose the chamber. The lid can be removed from the container and upturned so that the shaped support in the lid becomes an egg cup.

One feature of the lid is that in many embodiments it can be removed from the container and used as an egg cup. This may be achieved by upturning the lid so that the part of the lid adapted to support the top portion of the egg is used to support the bottom portion of the egg.

According to a third aspect of the present invention, there is provided a packaged egg comprising: an egg held in place by packaging , the packaging comprising: an open mouthed container surrounding the egg; and a lid closing the mouth of the container, the container having a body provided with a base and a surround wall or walls, and a base support for the base of the egg provided towards the base of the container, and the lid having a top support for the top of the egg; the bottom of the egg contacting the base support, and the top of the egg contacting the top support thereby holding the egg in place securely between the two supports; and wherein at least one of the supports has a degree of resilient flexibility so as to be able to accommodate eggs of different sizes whilst still holding or clamping an egg between the two supports securely enough so that it does not move around and break during transport.

In some embodiments, the egg is biased by one support towards the other support so as to slightly squeeze the egg between the supports. Typically the egg is aligned vertically between the supports, that is, the ends of the egg along its major axis are

aligned between the supports. However, the egg may also be aligned horizontally. In this instance, the supports may be configured to allow either orientation of the egg to be clamped between the two supports.

5 The base or top support may comprise a plurality of fingers which encircle a portion of the egg and support that portion of the egg, the fingers being adapted to be splayed outwardly, or resiliently move inwards, to accommodate forces on the egg and/or eggs of different sizes.

10 The egg may be centred or held in a desired location by a top and/or bottom support that encircles the egg, preferably an end of the egg. Preferably, the top or bottom support comprises a recess into which an end of the egg projects. The recess may be provided in a projecting platform or 'T' -like support, akin to a golf-tee, supporting an end of the egg. Both the top and the bottom support may be resiliently deformable to accommodate movement and/or different size eggs.

15 Preferably, the egg is held in the packaging in a position where there is free space around a large part of the egg, surrounding the egg, said free space being adapted to contain hot water in due course when the egg is warmed up.

20 Preferably the egg is disposed in the centre portion of the packaging, possibly at the central elongate axis (e.g. the vertical axis) of the packaging, with the heating-liquid space surrounding the egg, for example, surrounding the sides of the egg.

25 Preferably, the top and/or bottom supports for the egg have channels or passageways in them to allow heating water to pass beyond the line of contact of the support with the egg, and to be present at the other side of the line of contact, so that the egg can be warmed by hot water above and below the level contact of the support with the egg.

30 Optionally, the top support does not have such channels or passageways. The water may be able to get underneath the egg to be in contact with the bottom end of the egg, past the base support.

35 The lid may be removable from the body of the container. Accordingly, when the lid is removed from the container the top support, provided on the lid, may provide support for the egg when removed from the body of the container, thereby enabling

the lid of the container to serve as an eggcup, after the egg has been warmed. The lid may have a tapering projection, optionally frusto-conically shaped, provided with a recess at the end of the projection. The recess may be a closed recess (the recess having sidewalls and a base wall, the sidewalls being optionally generally cylindrical and the base being optionally flat).

The container may have an outwardly directed lid at the top edge of its side wall or walls, and the lid may have a complimentary roof or recess into which the lip of the sidewalls is received, and retained in use.

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The base support may comprise a separate component provided at the base of the container. The container and lid may be made of thin sheet-like material, for example a plastics material, such as polypropylene. Alternatively, one or the other may be made of cardboard materials or paper materials, possibly coated cardboard or paper materials to improve water impermeability.

15

The profile of the base support may be the same as the profile of the downwardly extending projection on the lid. This enables the same tool component to produce the portion of the lid that corresponds with the base support, reducing tooling costs.

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The base support, when a separate component, may be manufactured by producing (for example moulding) a lid and then stamping out of the lid the base support, cutting away unwanted parts of the lid, and optionally introducing resilient fingers in a circle surrounding the centre of the base support.

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The volume of the container is designed so that it holds enough water, but not too much water, so that if water is introduced into the container at about 95 °C (a typical temperature for water boiled in a kettle or office coffee machine), with an egg held in the container, the egg is sufficiently warmed prior to eating.

30

For an egg of 55g – 60g, we believe that an appropriate volume of water/space in the container to accommodate water is around 200 to 250ml. This is enough, when the water is introduced at around 95 °C and the egg is around 5 to 8°C to have the thermal energy to heat the yolk of the pre-cooked egg up to around 35°C to 40 °C within 5 minutes and in this way, the yolk of the egg does not become set and it remains runny.

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According to a fourth aspect of the current invention, there is provided packaging for heating an egg or other foodstuff, the packaging comprising: an open mouthed container with a base and surround wall or walls and a base support provided towards the base of the container for supporting a first end of a foodstuff; a lid with a top support for supporting a second end of a foodstuff, wherein the supports are resiliently flexible to securely hold the foodstuff when the lid closes the mouth of the container.

According to a fifth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of producing a packaged egg, the method comprising: providing an open mouthed container having a base and a surround wall or walls and a base support provided towards the base of the container; placing an egg into the container such that the bottom of the egg contacts the base support; providing a container with a lid and a top support; contacting the top of the egg with the top support; and closing the container and holding the egg securely between the two supports by placing the lid on the mouth of the container.

According to a sixth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of heating a packaged egg, the method comprising: providing a packaged egg according to the fifth aspect; removing the lid from the packaged egg; pouring hot water into the container; replacing the lid; and allowing a predetermined amount of time to lapse.

According to a seventh aspect of the present invention, there is provided a packaged egg heated according to the method of the sixth aspect.

According to an eighth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a tool for opening the shell of an egg comprising a spoon, wherein the handle of the spoon comprises a tooth for cracking the shell of an egg. A flattened or widened edge may be provided on the opposite side of the handle to the tooth to provide a surface for the application of pressure by a user. Additionally or alternatively, a ring, textured surface or other means to allow an even application of pressure or force to the tooth for cracking the egg may be used. The ring can be located within the handle of the spoon to assist in gripping of the spoon and in the application of pressure or force by the user to the tooth to crack the egg. The tooth may be provided in a concave cutaway on the handle, and the cutaway may have a curvature that corresponds to the

curvature of the egg to allow the cutaway to receive the egg after the tooth has cracked the shell.

According to a ninth aspect of the present invention, there is provided packaging for a plurality of eggs, wherein the packaging comprises: a plurality of containers according to the first aspect of the present invention, wherein the number of containers corresponds to the number of eggs. Preferably the containers are modular, each modular container adapted to hold a single egg. Such containers can be used for smaller eggs, such as quail eggs.

10

Preferred embodiments of the present invention will now be described with reference to the drawings, of which:

Figure 1 is a schematic cross-sectional representation of a container including a support, and an egg according to the present invention and also showing a lid according to embodiments of the present invention;

Figure 2a is a schematic perspective view representation of the egg and support of Figure 1a;

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Figure 2b is a side view representation of the support of Figure 2a;

Figure 2c is a top view representation of the support of Figure 2a and 2b;

Figure 3 is a side view representation of the support of Figure 2b when holding an egg;

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Figure 4a is a top view of the lid of Figure 1;

Figure 4b is a cross-sectional profile of the lid of Figure 4a;

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Figure 4c is a schematic representation of the lid of Figure 4a when inverted and used as an egg cup;

Figure 5 is a schematic perspective view of a container including a pot and a lid according to an alternative embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 6a is a top view representation of the pot of Figure 5;

Figure 6b is a cross-sectional profile of the pot of Figures 5 and 6a.

Figure 7a is a side view representation of the lid of Figure 5;

Figure 7b is a cross-sectional profile of the lid of Figure 5 and 7a;

Figure 8a is a partial cross-sectional view showing stacking of two lids shown in Figure 7b;

Figure 8b is a partial cross-sectional view showing stacking of two pots shown in Figure 6b;

Figure 9a is a schematic representation of a tool for use with the container of Figure 1 or Figure 5;

Figure 9b is a schematic representation of an alternative tool to that shown in Figure 9a for use with the container of Figure 1 or Figure 5;

Figure 10a is a schematic top-view representation of an alternative tool to that shown in Figures 9a and 9b for use with the container of Figure 1 or Figure 5;

Figure 10b is a schematic side view representation of the tool of Figure 10a;

Figure 10c is a schematic bottom-view representation of the tool of Figure 10a;

Figure 11a is a schematic view of an alternative embodiment of the invention, with the egg in a bag for transport;

Figure 11b is a schematic view of the egg of Figure 11a, placed within a container;

Figure 12 is a schematic view of the egg from Figure 11b which has been
5 removed from the bag for reheating; and

Figure 13 is a schematic view of a container where the base support has been formed directly from the base of the container according to an embodiment of the present invention.
10

Figure 1 shows a container 100 comprising a chamber 105 for housing an egg 110. The egg 110 is held within the container 100 by a support 115 and is sealed by a lid 120.

15 In the embodiment shown, the container 100 has a base 122 from which a side wall 124 of a cylinder extends, such that the base 122 caps one end of the cylinder. At the opposing ends of the side wall 124 is a lip 126 which provides a surface 128 against which the lid 120 may be placed and engage. The base 122 and side wall 124 define the chamber 105, with an internal volume 130 in which the egg is placed and in which
20 hot water may be added (see below).

The container 100 is generally made of a plastics material capable of withstanding temperatures greater than approximately 90 °C – 100°C. Exemplary materials include polypropylene. The container may be transparent, translucent or opaque and wrapped
25 in an insulated cardboard or similar insulating sleeve. The insulating sleeve may contain a ‘window or hole’ through which the product may be viewed through the transparent container aiding visual appeal when the container is placed on a shelf for sale, and allowing more visual control in the introduction of water into the container. However, other colours could be used as required.

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As shown in Figure 1, the container 100 additionally has a support 115 to hold the egg 110. The support 115 is configured to sit within the base 122 of the chamber 105. The support 115 is generally shaped as a frustoconical, open at least along one edge 132 to form an egg receiving portion akin to a standard egg cup. It may be
35 appreciated that the support 115 may be formed integrally with the base 122, or it may

have differing shapes, provided it performs the basic function of holding the egg 110. For example, the support may sit against or protrude from the side walls 124 rather than the base 122. The key aspect of the support 115 is to hold the egg 110 away from the base 122 and/or side wall 124 of the chamber 105. This is important to ensure that
5 when hot water is added to the chamber 105 the water can surround the egg 110, such that the area of the egg 110 not exposed to the hot water is minimised. This ensures an even and consistent reheating of the egg, which makes eating the egg more pleasurable.

10 The container additionally has a lid 120. The lid 120 is generally circular and is configured to engage with the lip 126 via surface 128 by virtue of its length, defined by a circular overhang 136. The lid 120 additionally comprises an egg supporting section 134 that is shaped to support a top portion of the egg 110 and acts to restrict movement of the egg 110 within the chamber 105. Additional detail of the support
15 115 and the lid 120 are provided with reference to the proceeding figures below.

Although shown as cylindrical with a circular base, container 100 may be formed of any suitable shape including square, octagonal etc. Accordingly, the shape of the lid 120 and support 115 may vary to match the shape of the container.

20

Figures 2a – 2c show alternative views of the support 115. The support 115 generally comprises a circular base 140 from which a generally frustoconical surface 142 extends. The surface 142 is shown as a discontinuous surface formed of discrete frustoconical sections 144, 146, 148, although it may be a continuous surface. The
25 surface 142 terminates in an edge 132 configured and shaped to support and hold an egg 110.

Upper section 148 of surface 142 is provided with a plurality of cutaways or openings 150 along surface 132. These openings 150 act to allow hot water placed within the
30 chamber 105 to surround the bottom of an egg 110. In the example shown, the openings 150 are triangular cutaway sections formed in edge 132, however alternative openings may be provided along the edge 132 or they may be cutaway and/or punched from surface 142. The openings additionally act to reduce the buoyancy of the support when water is added to the container 100, ensuring that the support 115
35 remains in contact with the base 122.

In addition to openings 150, flexure slots 152 may be formed in section 148, dividing section 148 into a plurality of tabs or fingers 154. The fingers or tabs 154 can flex outwardly to accommodate forces applied to the egg, and to accommodate differently sized eggs. The flexure slots 152 act to reduce the rigidity and the pressure exerted by the edge 132 against the egg 110. This is particularly important if the lid 120 exerts too great a clamping action against the egg 110, for example if the egg 110 is slightly larger than standard.

As noted above, the tabs 154 may be fashioned to allow hot water to go under the egg. Additionally, the tabs 154 allow air that may be entrapped within the container to escape from underneath the egg during any heating stages. Importantly the flexibility of the fingers allows the packaging to accommodate natural variations in egg diameter and size within the previously selected 5g weight band.

Figure 3 shows how the support 115 supports and holds the egg 110. The bottom of the egg protrudes past edge 132 and into a volume defined by the bottom of the egg, the surface 142 and the base 122 of the container 100. Figure 3 highlights the importance of the openings 150 to ensure hot water enters this volume and can surround the bottom of the egg. As can be seen, the openings 150 act to break the edge 132 in contact with the egg 110, such that the openings 150 are approximately triangular shaped defined by the cutaway on the edge 132 and the outer surface of the egg 110.

Figures 4a and 4b show alternative views of the lid 120 of Figure 1. As shown in Figure 4a, the lid is generally circular and forms a continuous surface. The lid 120 therefore can act as a water tight seal (or more or less water tight seal) for the chamber 105. The lid interacts with the chamber via an overhang 136 and surface 160 that interacts with surface 128 of the container lip 126 to form a friction fit between the surfaces 160, 128. The overhang 136 additionally comprises a rim 162 that acts to provide a separation between the overhang 136 and the sidewalls 124 to assist a user in removing the lid 120 from the sidewalls 124.

The lid 120 additionally has a frustoconical surface 164 extending from the overhang portion 136 towards egg support section 134. The frustoconical surface 164 is

generally similarly shaped to the frustoconical surface 148 of the support 115 (although when attached to the chamber sidewalls, the surface 164 is inverted). The surface 164 is separated from the egg support section 134 by a flat ledge 166 that is orientated parallel to the surface 160. Primarily, this ledge 166 adds to the aesthetic appeal of the lid 120 (for reasons that will be described below) and adds to the structural rigidity of the lid and the egg supporting section 134.

The egg supporting section 134 is formed from an egg engaging surface 168 that, in use, with an egg 110 in the chamber 105 and the lid placed on the chamber, engages with the top of the egg to support the egg and restrict the movement of the egg within the chamber. This serves two main purposes – firstly it ensures that the egg 110 is presented centrally within the chamber 105, which is important to aid the aesthetic appeal of the container 100 during sale and to ensure an even distribution of hot water surrounds the egg 110 during reheating. Secondly, the lid 120 and the support 115 cooperate to clamp the egg 110 against the up and down movement and against radial, side-to-side movement) and prevent unwanted movement during transport, display and the reheating process.

The egg supporting section additionally has a hollow 170 with a base 172 and sidewalls 174. The sidewalls 174 and base 172 are integral with the lid 120 and form a continuous surface with ledge 166, surface 164, 160, overhang 136 and rim 162. The hollow 170 is defined by the volume between the base 172 and the sidewalls 174. The hollow is able to receive the top of the egg 110 which extends beyond the egg engaging surface 168. As noted above, the engagement between the egg engaging surface 168 and the egg 110 may be generally loose enough to allow water ingress into the hollow 170, whilst still preventing unwanted movement of the egg 110. This ensures that the top of the egg is surrounded by heating water.

Due to the geometry of the lid 120, when placed on the chamber 105, the outer surface of the lid has a recess 176 defined between the frustoconical surface 164 and the sidewalls 174. The recess 176 provides a volume in which condiments or other accessories may be provided to enhance the eating experience. Examples include salt, pepper, spices etc. Tea or coffee is another alternative. The recess may also be used to house cutlery. If the recess 176 is used in this way, a cover (not shown) will be needed to constrain the accompaniments within the recess 176.

The lid 120 may also be removed from the chamber 105 and inverted to form an egg cup. The egg receiving portion 134 can then be used to support and hold the bottom of the egg 110 as shown in Figure 4c.

5

The lid 120 and the support 115 have a similar cross-section. This allows the lid 120 and the support 115 to be made from the same tooling/moulding apparatus. In order to make the support from the lid, the ledge 166, sidewall 174 and base 172 can be removed before the surface 132 is processed to create the required openings 150 and slots 152.

10

In an alternative embodiment, openings may be provided in the lid 120, such as in the sidewalls 174 to allow water to be poured into the recess 176 and into the chamber 105 via the openings. This additionally allows the water to be removed from the chamber, once the water has cooled and the egg is sufficiently heated, by upending the container allowing water to flow out of the chamber 105.

15

The accompaniments can also be provided within the internal volume 130 of the container 100. The internal volume is generally at least twice the volume of the egg 110 to allow sufficient hot water into the container 100 to heat the egg 110 the desired amount. This volume 130 provides space to provide the accompaniments described above. This space is also more suited to housing cutlery than the recess 176.

20

Figure 5 shows a schematic representation of a container 200 according to an alternative embodiment. Figure 5 broadly shows a container 200 with a pot 205 and lid 220, which will be described in further detail below. The pot 205 has a base 222 and a side wall 224 as per the embodiment shown in Figure 1. Additionally, the base or base portion 222 is provided with legs 223 to support the pot 205 and to aid aesthetics and manufacture. Also shown in Figure 5 is the lid 220, which fastens to the pot 205. The lid is contoured to provide aesthetic value and also to provide a space sized for accommodating an egg (not shown) in a similar manner to that shown for Figure 1. A domed portion 272 of the lid sits above an egg to securely clamp the egg in place within the container and again for aesthetic reasons.

25

30

Figure 6a is a top view representation of the pot of Figure 5 (i.e. the container with the lid removed). Figure 6b shows a cross-sectional view of the pot of Figure 5. The pot 205 comprises a base portion 222, side walls 224 and a top portion 226.

5 The base portion 222 comprises a plurality of feet 223 separated by bridge sections 225. Due to the need to support an egg within the pot, the use of feet 223 and bridge sections 225 allow a better material distribution and also provide a greater clearance between the egg support features (described below) and the side walls of the base portion 222. This makes the base area more suitable for moulding.

10

The side walls 224 extend from the base portion and form a square pot 205, although it can be appreciated that a cylindrical or other shaped pot may be chosen. The side walls, together with the base portion 222 provide a chamber 230 with an internal volume for receiving an egg and liquid to re-heat the egg. Cutlery or other
15 condiments and accompaniments may be provided as previously described.

The side walls 224 are connected to a generally cylindrical top portion 226 by a flared surface 228. The top portion 226 generally provides a surface 230 with a lip 232 on and against which the lid 220 rests and secures.

20

The base portion 222 additionally has egg support features, in this case lugs 248 against which an egg can rest and be secured in position relative to the pot 205. Ideally, as shown, the egg support lugs 248 hold an egg substantially within the middle of the pot or container as viewed from above and the side. This aids the
25 aesthetic appeal of the container and ensures an even distribution of liquid or water around the egg during reheating. The lugs 248 are typically spaced apart to form openings 250. The egg supports lugs 248 and openings 250 are arranged in a ring to support the external surface of, typically, the tapered end of an egg. Within the ring is a concave surface 252 shaped in a similar manner to an egg to prevent movement of
30 the egg in the event that the lugs 248 do not securely hold the egg. The concave surface 252 is additionally shaped in this manner to add aesthetic value.

The openings 250 allow access to a space 260 defined between the egg and the concave surface. During reheating, water is free to access the space 260 and provides
35 heating of the egg past the lugs 248. In this way, even heating of the egg is ensured

and areas of the egg without exposure to the heating of the water is eliminated or severely reduced.

Figure 7a is a side view representation of the lid 220 of Figure 5. Figure 7b is a cross-sectional view of Figure 7a. The lid 220 generally has a cylindrical top portion 260 shaped to receive and sit against the top surface 230 of the pot 205. The external surface of the top portion 260 has a downward lip 262 with a number of indentations that form tabs on the interior surface. The tabs interact with the lip 232 on the pot 205 to secure the lid 220 to the pot 205. This acts to prevent the lid from coming off the pot and may also act to bias the lid and pot together, helping to clamp the egg into position.

The lid has a top surface 270 with a plateau 274 provided around the outer edge. The top surface 270 has a generally flat portion 276 and a domed portion 272. Adjacent to the domed portion 272 is a smaller flat area 278. The flat area 278 is connected to the flat portion 276 via an upright 280 and a chamfered or sloped portion 282.

The flat portion 276 can receive a cardboard cover or sleeve that defines a chamber 290 between the domed portion and such cover. This chamber 290 can be used to store instructions, condiments, etc.

As described previously, the domed portion 272 is shaped to receive an egg (not shown). The egg is typically held against the domed portion 272 of the lid 220 by an engagement surface 292. In use, the domed portion of the lid acts to prevent unwanted movement of the egg during transport. It acts with the egg support lugs 248 and the concave surface 252 to securely clamp the egg into position within the centre of the container 200.

Figures 8a and 8b show stacking of lids 220 and pots 205 respectively. It can be seen that the lids are configured to stack due to the engagement of surfaces 278a on the exterior of a first lid 220 with surface 280a on the interior of a second lid. Additionally surfaces 260a on the interior of the first lid and 262a on the exterior of the second lid also engage. Similarly, for the pots, surface 230a on the exterior of a first pot 205 engages an exterior surface 228a of a second pot. This stacking of the

lids and pots minimises the space required for storage and transport of the individual components.

One example of cutlery that is provided is shown in Figure 9a. Figure 9a shows a spoon with an oval shaped head that is sized to allow eating of the contents of the egg 110. The spoon handle 320 has an end portion 322 with a cutaway 324 along one edge of the spoon handle 320 and a flattened portion 326 on the opposing edge of the spoon handle. The cutaway 324 additionally has at least one saw-tooth shaped tooth 328. The tooth 328 is intended for use to crack open the shell of the egg 110. The cutaway is typically concave and has a curvature that substantially corresponds to the inverse curvature of the egg 110 to allow the curvature to receive the egg after the tooth 328 has cracked the shell of the egg 110.

Figure 9b shows an alternative embodiment for the cutlery shown in Figure 9a. In this embodiment, the flattened portion 326 is supplemented by a ring 330 such that the flattened portion 326 is formed into a ring 330. The ring allows a finger to be inserted and held into position against the flattened portion 326. This aids in the gripping of the spoon and distribution of pressure when cracking the egg. It may be appreciated that the flattened portion can be removed or altered such that the ring is circular.

20

Figures 10a – 10c show another alternative embodiment of the cutlery. In this example, the tool 340 again is generally spoon shaped and is provided with an oval shaped head 342 and an oval shaped handle 344. The handle 344 and head 342 are joined by a neck portion 346. The underside of the neck portion 346 is provided with a series of raised grips or ridges 348 for aiding gripping of the tool 340. On the underside of the handle is provided a tooth 349 that provides a similar functionality to the tooth 328 described above. It can be appreciated that other similarities and advantages inherent with the embodiments described in Figures 9a and 9b are also applicable to Figures 10a- 10c, in particular a flattened portion 345 in the handle 344 for aiding the distribution of pressure when using the tooth 349 to crack the shell of an egg. The tooth 349 is generally longer or higher, that is it projects away from the bottom surface an amount, than the thickness of the tool 340. Typically, the tooth is at least 2 mm high, such as 2.5 mm.

30

In use, the lid is removed from the chamber 105 using rim 162. Any condiments or accessories within the container can then be removed. The pre-cooked in shell soft boiled egg 110 can then be aligned on support 115 as described above. Embodiments also allow the egg to be placed directly within the chamber 105, without using a support 115. Hot water, typically between 90°C and 100°C and more typically 95°C can be poured into the chamber 105 to fill the internal volume 130. The lid 120 can then be replaced to support the egg 110. Alternatively, embodiments may include the lid 120 being provided with one or more holes to allow the hot water to be poured into the chamber 105 without removing the lid. The chamber 105 may include markings on the sidewall 124 to indicate the required and desired fill amount of hot water. Once replaced, the lid 120 displaces a small amount of water into the hollow 170. Due to the openings 150 in the support 115, hot water now fully surrounds the egg 110, which is centrally aligned within the chamber 105 by the support 115 and the lid 120. The container 100 is then left for approximately 5 minutes to allow the egg 110 to warm. After 5 minutes, the outer temperature of the egg 110 and the water is approximately equal and approximately 75 °C. Heating the egg to for this length of time warms the yolk of the egg to around 35 – 40 °C. This is well below the yolk threshold temperature of 65°C above which the yolk starts to harden. As noted above, the egg has been precooked to the desired consistency for the egg white and egg yolk.

20

To serve, the lid 120 is removed from the container 100 and the egg 110 removed from the chamber 105. In embodiments where holes are provided in the lid 120, the water within the chamber may first be drained by upturning the container 100, allowing the water to flow out of the chamber 105 via the holes. As noted above, the lid 120, when upturned, can be used as an egg cup. Once the egg 110 has been removed from the chamber 105, it can be placed on the upturned lid 120.

Once the egg has been reheated to the desired amount, the tool 300 may be used to remove the shell of the egg 110. In use, the cutaway edge 324 of the tool 300 may be placed against the top portion of the egg 100, pressing tooth 328 against the shell. By applying a rocking action, the tooth 328 can pierce the shell. The flattened surface 326 acts to distribute the applied pressure by a user, minimising any discomfort caused in this action. The oval portion 310 of the spoon can then be used to remove the rest of the top portion of the egg in the usual manner.

35

It can be appreciated that the use scenario described above in relation to Figures 1 to 5 and 9a, can also be applied to the embodiments of the container described in Figures 6 to 8 and the cutlery described in Figures 9b and 10.

- 5 The egg 110 may be provided in a plastics bag 350 or vacuum wrap/sleeve in the container 150 as shown in Figure 11a. The plastics bag 350 may be the same bag/sleeve that the egg 110 was in when the egg was pasteurised and cooked at the factory/facility that made the pre-cooked egg.
- 10 Figure 11b shows the egg 110 provided in a bag/sleeve 350 inside the container 105. In this case, the bag/sleeve may also help to cushion the egg from shocks when the packaged egg is transported. For example, the bag 350 may extend beyond the egg and be flexible and fold and press against the inside of the container 105, thereby helping to cushion the egg.

15

- The plastic bag 350 is typically made of a polyethylene/nylon blend, although other suitable plastics may be used. In the embodiment shown, the bag 350 is transparent and approximately square shaped, with an opening 356 that forms a pouch for receiving the egg 110. Once the egg 110 is placed within the bag 350, air can be
- 20 evacuated from bag using a standard vacuum machine as is known in the art. Additionally, crimping 354 is used to seal the bag along the opening 356. This process forms crease marks 358 on the bag 350.

- As noted above, the bag 350 is typically large enough to contact at least one wall of
- 25 the container 105. The bag 350 also generally has enough structural rigidity to provide cushioning for the egg 110. A schematic of the egg 110 provided in the plastic bag 350 is shown in Figure 11a. This figure shows a schematic top view representation of an egg 110 sealed within an air-tight plastic bag 350. Such techniques are known in sous-vide cooking, for example. First, an egg 110 is placed
- 30 within a plastic bag 350. Once the egg 110 is placed within the bag 350, air can be evacuated from bag using a standard vacuum machine as is known in the art. Additionally, crimping 354 is used to seal the bag along the opening 356. This process forms crease marks 358 on the bag 350.

In order to reheat the egg, the egg is removed from the plastic bag or vacuum wrap/sleeve and then placed back in the pot when the hot water 260 is poured into the container 105 either with the lid 120 removed, or through holes in the lid once the lid has been replaced. This is shown in Figure 12. As noted above, the temperature of the water 260, typically between 90°C and 100°C and more typically 95°C, can be poured into the chamber 105 to fill the internal volume 130. The temperature of the yolk of the soft-boiled egg 110 reaches approximately between 35°C and 40°C after immersion in the water 260 for 5 minutes. Once the egg 110 is reheated to the desired temperature, the water 260 can be drained from the container 100 and the egg 110 consumed as described above.

Again, as noted above, it can be appreciated that the bag 350 can be provided with the container 200 and the use scenario described applied in an analogous manner.

Figure 13 shows an alternative embodiment with a container 400. It can be appreciated that the container 400 has similarities to the container 100, with like components provided with like reference numerals. As shown in Figure 13, container 400 comprises a chamber 405 for housing an egg 110. The container 400 has a support 415 with a base 422 from which a side wall 424 of a cylinder extends, such that the base 422 caps one end of the cylinder. The support 415 is analogous to the base 122 and support 115 of the embodiment described for figures 1- 12. In this embodiment, the base 122 and support 115 have been integrated in support 415.

At the opposing ends of the side wall 424 is a lip 426 which provides a surface 428 against which the lid 120 may be placed and engage. The base 422 and side wall 424 define the chamber 405, with an internal volume 430 in which the egg is placed and in which hot water may be added (as described above).

The egg 110 is held within the container 400 between the support 415 and a lid 120. The support 415 is formed to provide support to the egg 110 in a similar manner to that described for the support 115. Accordingly, the features of the support 115 are equally applicable to the support 415. The support 415 is provided with an egg supporting structure 434 shaped similarly to an egg cup and formed from an egg supporting surface 468. The support 415 generally comprises a circular edge 440 from which a generally frustoconical surface 442 extends.

In use, with an egg 110 in the chamber 405 and the lid 120 placed on the chamber, the egg supporting surface 468 engages with the bottom of the egg 110 to support the egg and restrict the movement of the egg within the chamber 405. This serves two main purposes – firstly it ensures that the egg 110 is presented centrally within the chamber 405, which is important to aid the aesthetic appeal of the container 100 during sale and to ensure an even distribution of hot water surrounds the egg 110 during reheating. Secondly, the lid 120 and the support 415 cooperate to clamp the egg 110 against the up and down movement and against radial, side-to-side movement) and prevent unwanted movement during transport, display and the reheating process.

The egg supporting surface 468 additionally defines a volume 470 between the egg, a bottom surface 472 and side surfaces 474 of the support 415. The side surfaces 474 and bottom surface 472 are integral with the base 422 and form a continuous surface. The volume 470 is able to receive the bottom of the egg 110 which extends beyond the egg engaging surface 468. As noted above, the engagement between the egg engaging surface 468 and the egg 110 may be generally loose enough to allow water ingress into the volume 470, whilst still preventing unwanted movement of the egg 110. This ensures that the bottom of the egg 110 is surrounded by heating water.

20

The eggs may be chicken eggs, or ostrich, or duck, or quail, or goose, or any egg. The relative sizes of the components of the container can then be adjusted according the size and diameter of the shell egg, as well as the species of egg.

Furthermore, although shown as a single egg within a single container, it can be envisaged that multiple eggs may be packaged within a single container. Such a container may comprise a plurality of modular containers, each modular container adapted to hold a single egg. Such containers can be used for smaller eggs, such as quail eggs.

30

The eggs may not be eggs: they may be food products which when cooked have a solidified/gelled outer layer and a liquid inner region, such as a scotch egg.

The eggs may be confectionary eggs such as chocolate eggs or decorated eggs which may be hollow, solid or with a runny or soft centre.

35

Claims

1. A container for storing an egg for transport and for reheating an egg, the container comprising:
 - 5 a chamber for receiving an egg to be reheated by hot water;
 - a support to hold the egg in the chamber;wherein the support allows hot water placed within the chamber to surround the bottom of the egg.
- 10 2. The container of claim 1, wherein the support comprises one or more openings to allow hot water to pass from a first side of the support to a second side of the support.
3. The container of claim 2, wherein the support holds the bottom of the egg via a contact surface.
 - 15
4. The container of claim 3, wherein the one or more openings are provided in the contact surface to provide a discontinuous contact between the support and the egg.
 - 20
5. The container of any preceding claim, wherein the support holds the egg substantially in the centre of the chamber.
6. The container of any preceding claim, further comprising:
 - 25 a lid to enclose the chamber, the lid shaped to support a top portion of the egg to restrict movement of the egg within the chamber.
7. The container of claim 6, wherein the lid and the support cooperate to resiliently clamp the egg.
 - 30
8. The container of claim 6 or claim 7, wherein the lid can be removed from the container and be used as an egg cup.
9. The container of any one of claims 6 to 8, wherein the lid comprises a domed portion for receiving and supporting the egg.
 - 35

10. The container of any one of claims 6 to 9, wherein the support and the lid are made from the same forming mould.
- 5 11. The container of any one of claims 6 to 10, wherein the lid comprises a recess for containing condiments.
12. The container of any preceding claim, wherein the volume of the chamber is at least twice the volume of the egg to allow at least one of: condiments, cutlery and accompanying food stuffs to be provided within the chamber.
- 10 13. The container of any preceding claim, further comprising a tool for opening the shell of the egg.
- 15 14. The container of claim 13, wherein the tool comprises a spoon, the handle of the spoon comprising a tooth for cracking the shell of an egg.
15. The container of claim 14, the handle of the spoon further comprising a flattened or widened edge on the opposite side to the tooth to facilitate application of pressure by user.
- 20 16. The container of claim 14 or claim 15, wherein the length of the tooth is greater than the thickness of the handle.
- 25 17. The container of claim 16, wherein the tooth is at least 2 mm high.
18. The container of any one of claims 14 to 17, wherein the handle of the spoon further comprises:
- ridges to assist gripping of the spoon and application of pressure by a user to the tooth when cracking the shell.
- 30 19. The container of any preceding claim, wherein the support is formed integrally with the container.

20. A container of any preceding claim, wherein the egg is provided within a plastics bag, optionally a bag vacuum sealed to the egg.
- 5 21. A packaged in-shell soft boiled egg comprising a pre-cooked soft boiled egg provided inside a container, the container having a volume sufficiently large that when filled or part-filled with hot water at about 95 °C to cover the egg, the yolk of the soft boiled egg reaches a temperature of approximately 35 °C to 40 °C 5 minutes after the water has been added.
- 10 22. The packaged in-shell soft boiled egg according to claim 21, wherein the volume of the container is 4 to 5 times the volume of the egg.
23. The packaged in-shell soft boiled egg according to claim 21 or claim 22, where the temperature of the yolk will continue to rise in temperature to typically 55
15 °C to 60 °C 10 minutes after the water has been added.
24. The packaged in-shell soft boiled egg according to any one of claims 21 to 23, wherein the pre-cooked soft boiled egg is provided in a bag, optionally a plastics bag, optionally a bag vacuum sealed to the egg.
- 20 25. The packaged in-shell soft boiled egg according to any one of claims 21 to 24, wherein the container additionally comprises a lid to enclose the chamber and shaped to support a top portion of the egg to restrict movement of the egg within the chamber.
- 25 26. A packaged egg comprising an egg held in place by packaging, the packaging comprising:
an open mouthed container surrounding the egg the container having a body provided with a base and a surround wall or walls, and a base support for
30 the base of the egg provided towards the base of the container; and
a lid closing the mouth of the container, the lid having a top support for the top of the egg,
wherein the egg contacts the base support and the egg contacts the top support, thereby holding the egg in place securely between the two supports;
35 and wherein at least one of the supports has a degree of resilient flexibility so

as to be able to accommodate eggs of different sizes whilst still holding or clamping an egg between the two supports securely enough so that it does not move around and break during transport.

- 5 27. The packaged egg according to claim 26, wherein at least one of the top and bottom supports are biased towards the other support so as to clamp the egg between the supports.
- 10 28. Packaging for heating an egg or other foodstuff, the packaging comprising:
 an open mouthed container with a base and surround wall or walls and a base support provided towards the base of the container for supporting a first end of a foodstuff;
 a lid with a top support for supporting a second end of a foodstuff, wherein the supports are resiliently flexible to securely hold the foodstuff
15 when the lid closes the mouth of the container.
29. A method of producing a packaged egg, the method comprising:
 providing an open mouthed container having a base and a surround wall or walls and a base support provided towards the base of the container;
20 placing an egg into the container such that the bottom of the egg contacts the base support;
 providing a container with a lid and a top support;
 contacting the top of the egg with the top support; and
 closing the container and holding the egg securely between the two
25 supports by placing the lid on the mouth of the container.
30. A method of heating a packaged egg, the method comprising:
 providing a packaged egg according to claim 29;
 removing the lid from the packaged egg;
30 pouring hot water into the container;
 replacing the lid; and
 allowing a predetermined amount of time to lapse.

31. A packaged egg heated according to the method of claim 30.
- 35

32. A tool for opening the shell of the egg, comprising a spoon, the handle of the spoon comprising a tooth for cracking the shell of an egg.
33. The tool of claim 32, the handle of the spoon further comprising a flattened or widened edge on the opposite side to the tooth to facilitate application of pressure by a user.
34. The tool of claim 32 or 33, wherein the length of the tooth is greater than the thickness of the handle.
35. The tool of claim 34, wherein the tooth is at least 2 mm high.
36. The tool of any one of claims 32 to 35, wherein the handle of the spoon further comprises:
ridges to assist gripping of the spoon and application of pressure by a user to the tooth when cracking the shell.
37. Packaging for a plurality of eggs, wherein the packaging comprises:
a plurality of containers according to any one of claims 1 to 19, the number of containers corresponding to the number of eggs.

1/16

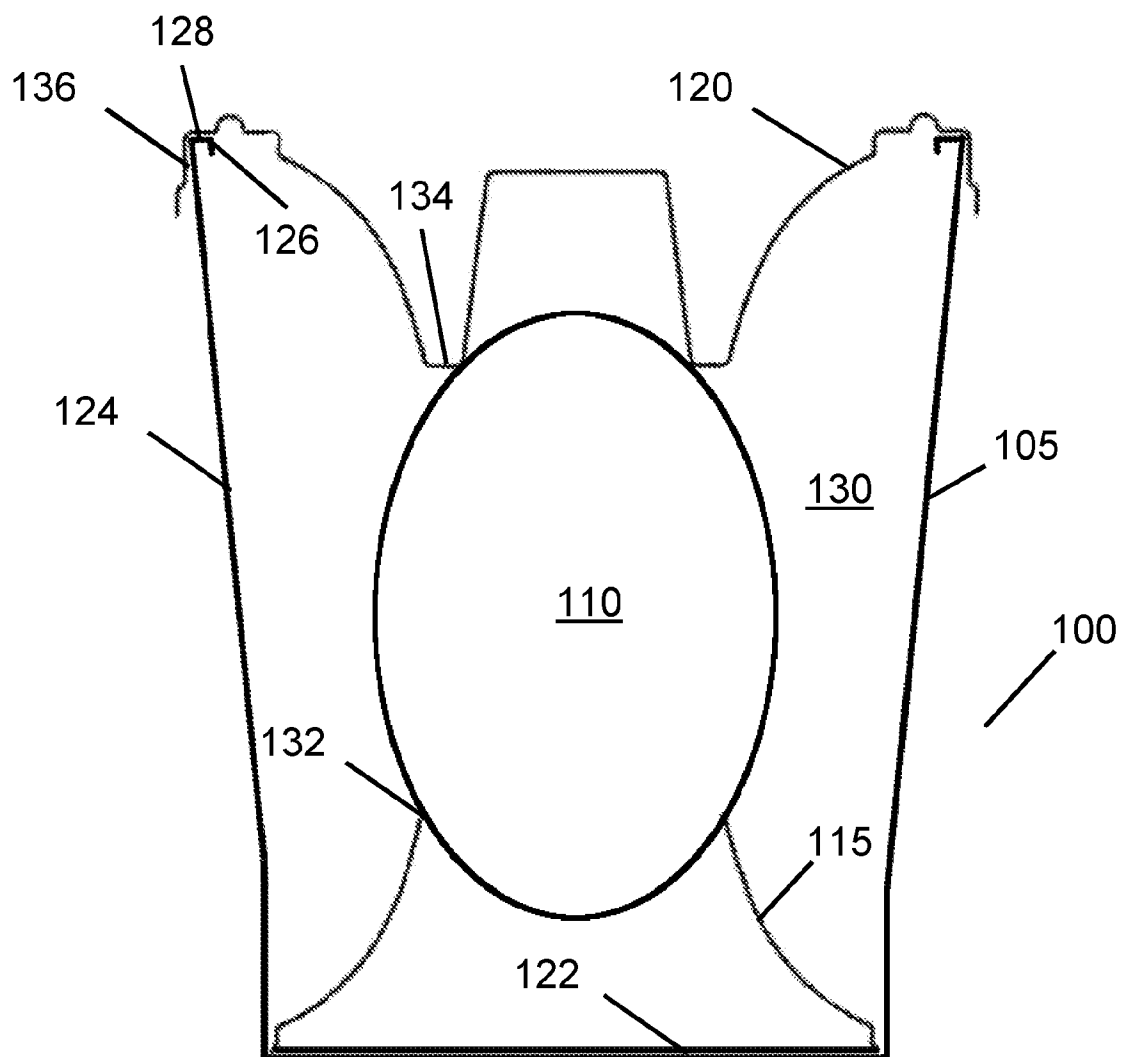


Figure 1

2/16

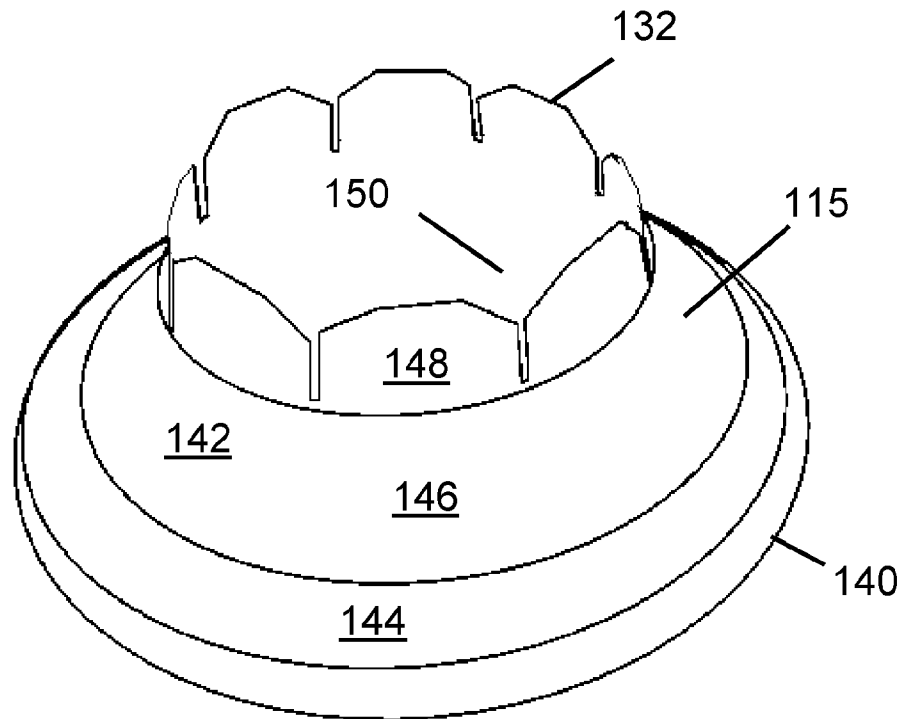
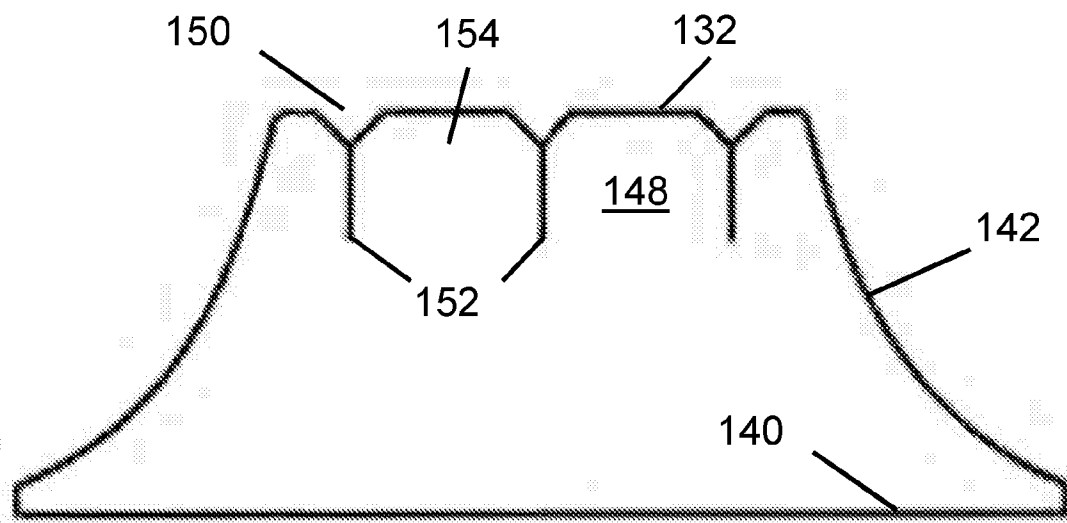


Figure 2a



115 / Figure 2b

3/16

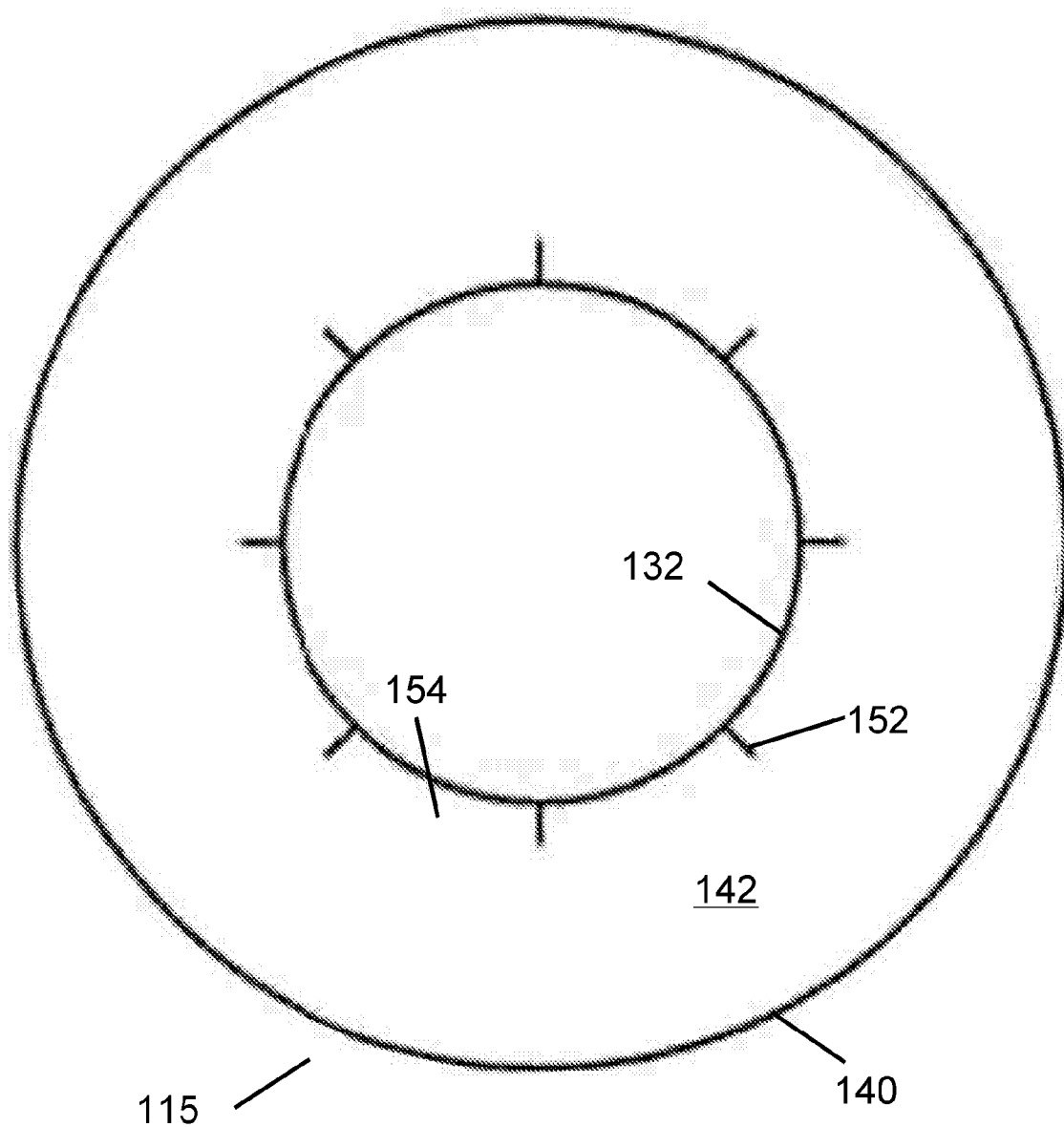


Figure 2c

4/16

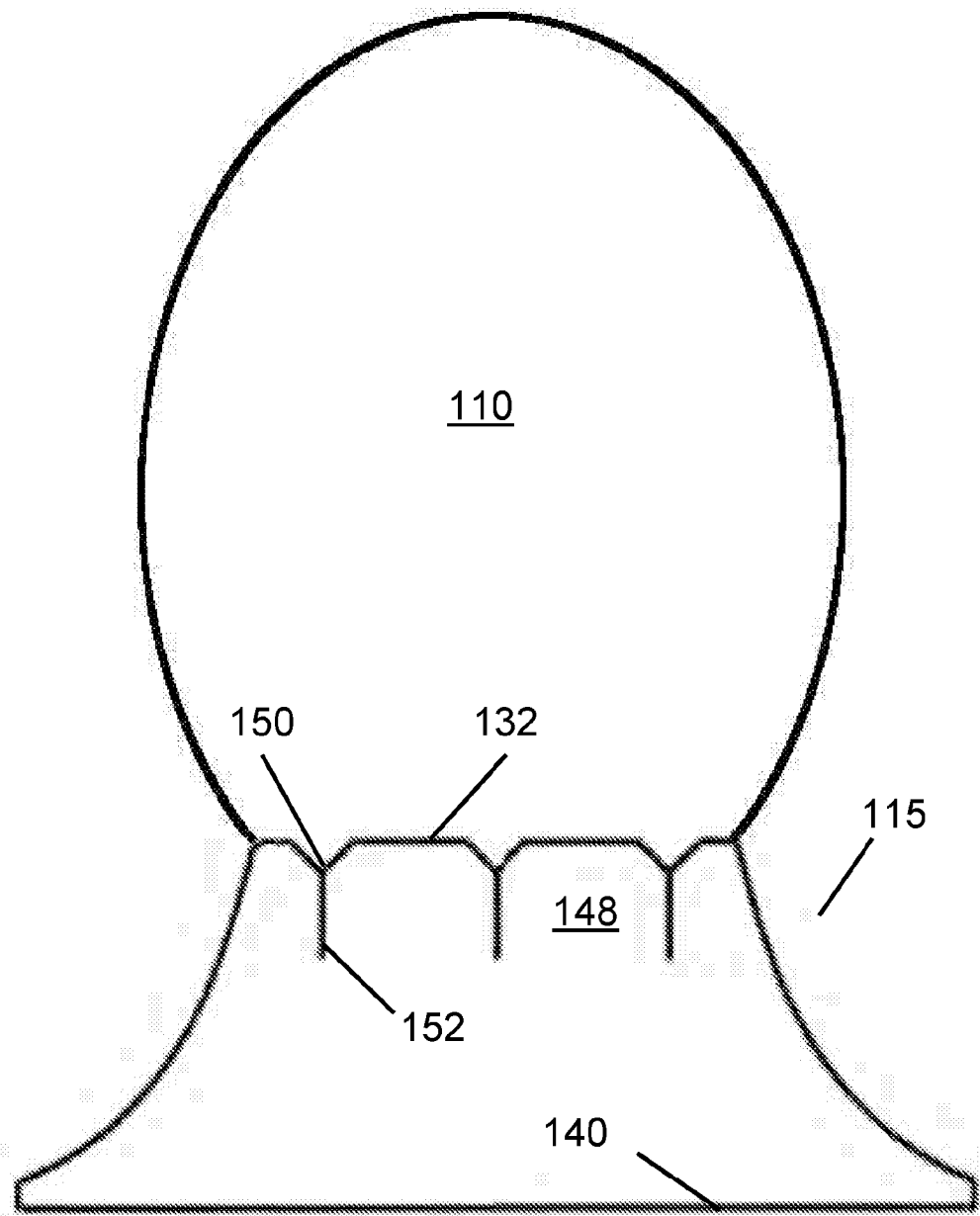


Figure 3

5/16

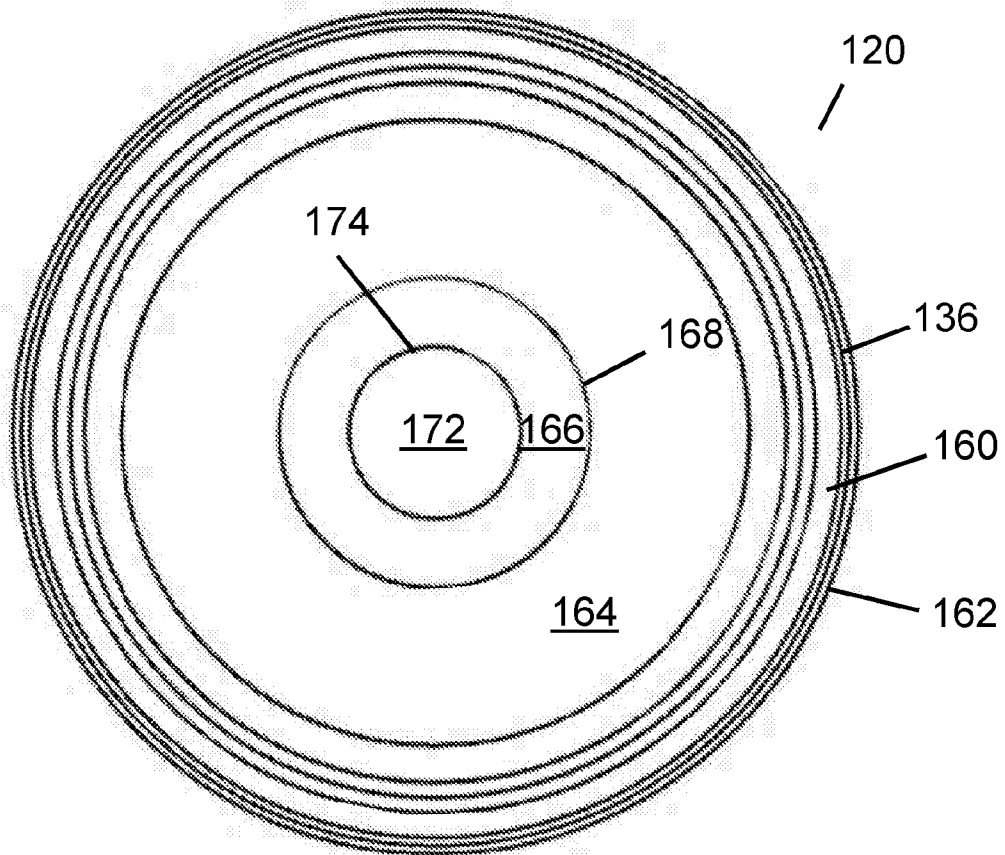


Figure 4a

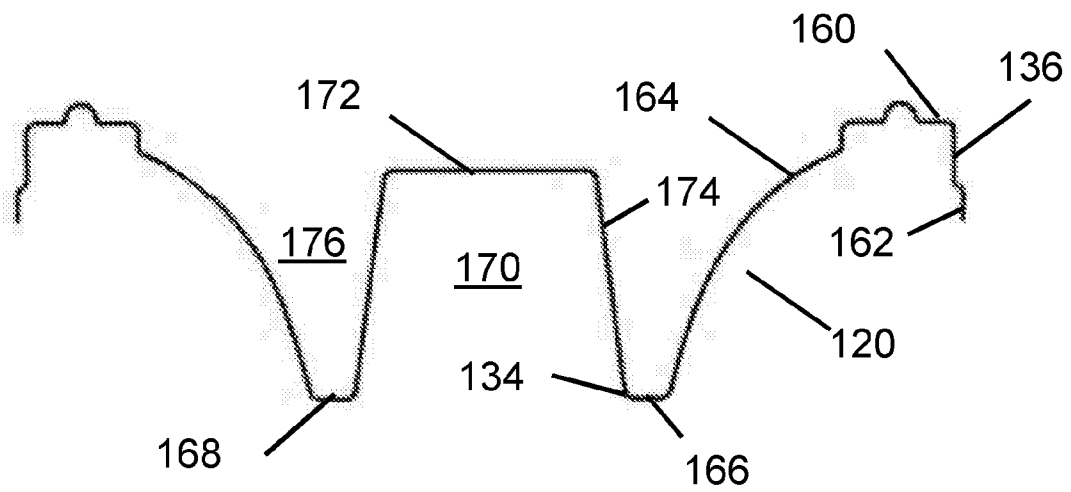


Figure 4b

6/16

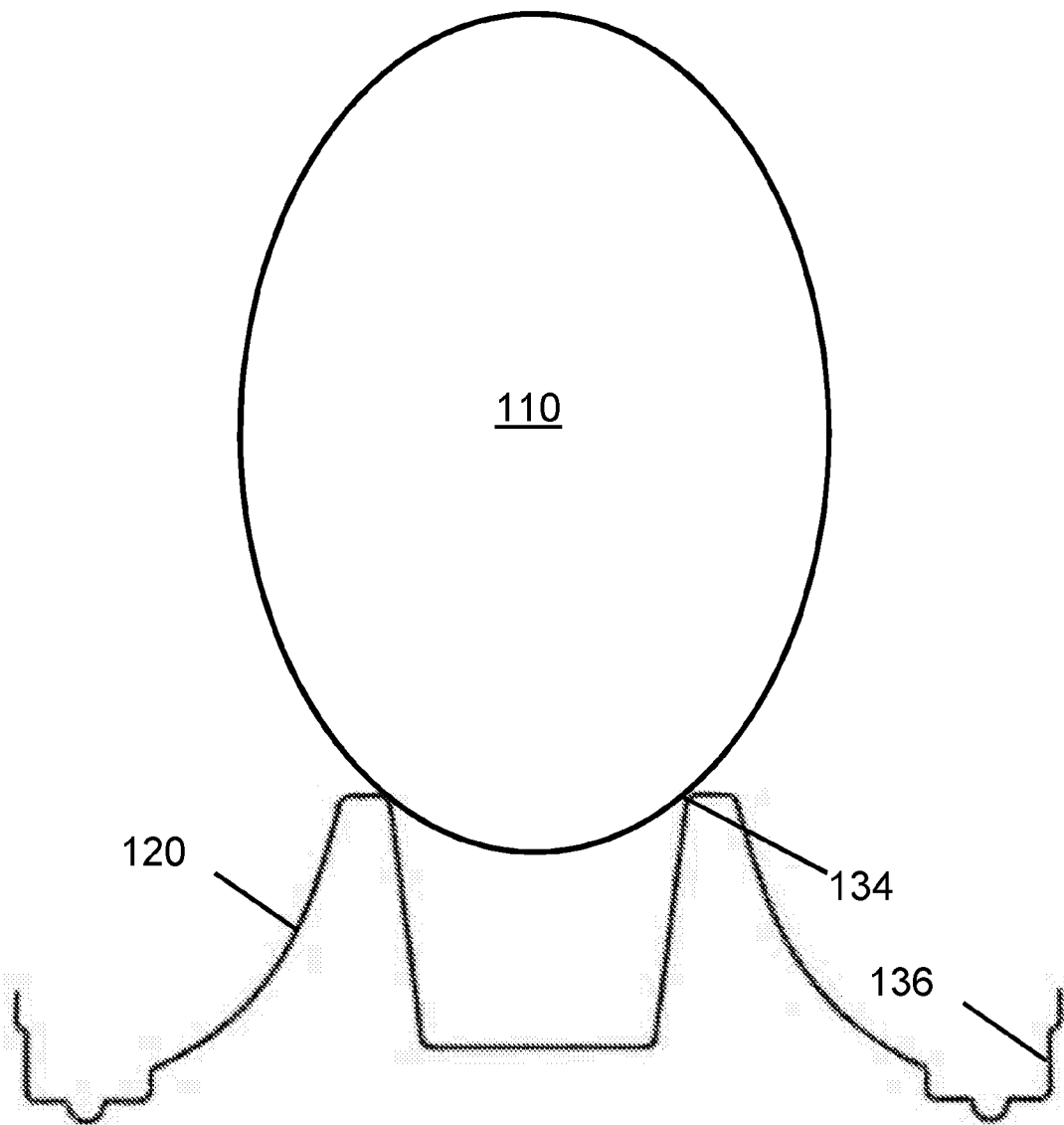


Figure 4c

7/16

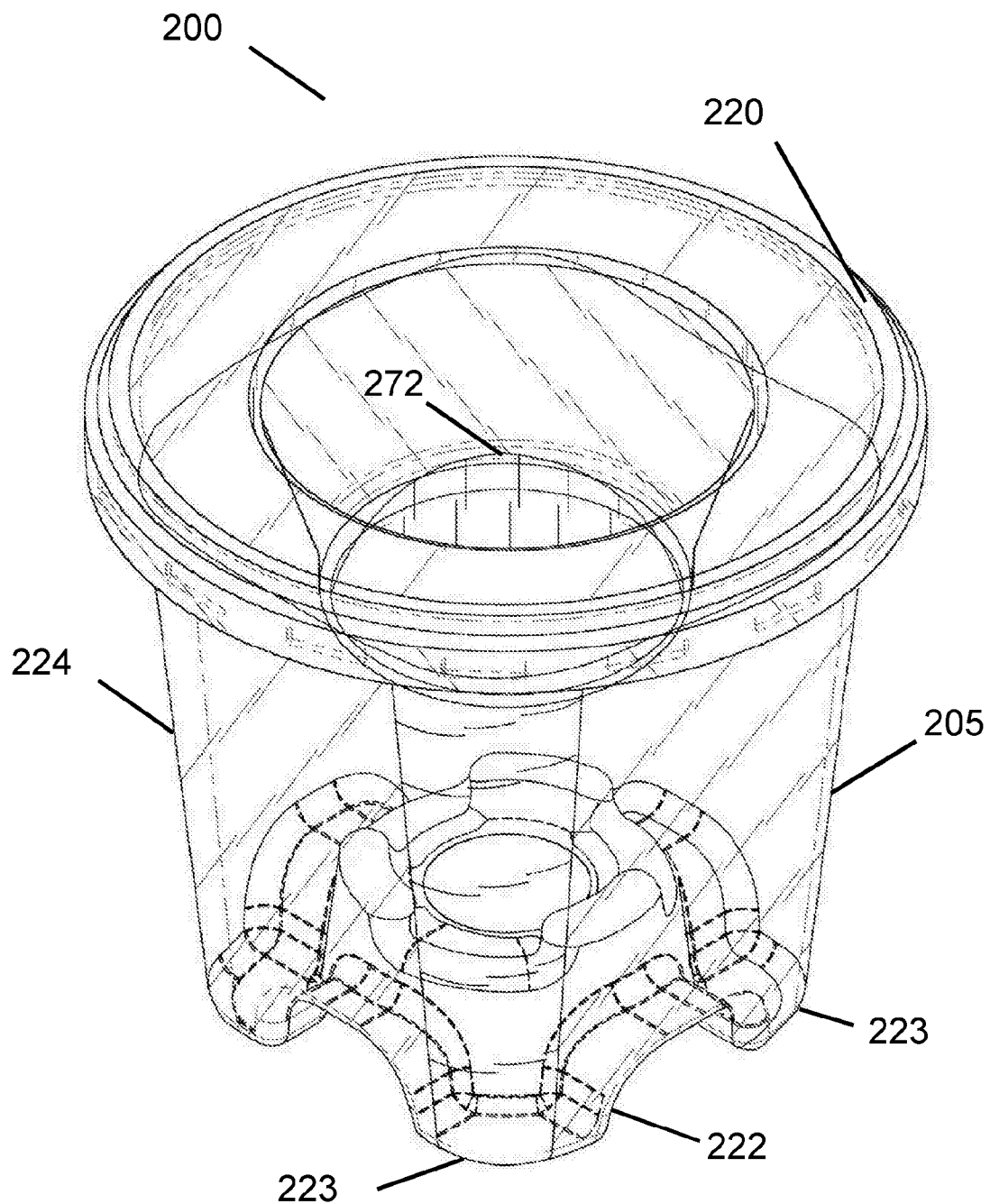


Figure 5

8/16

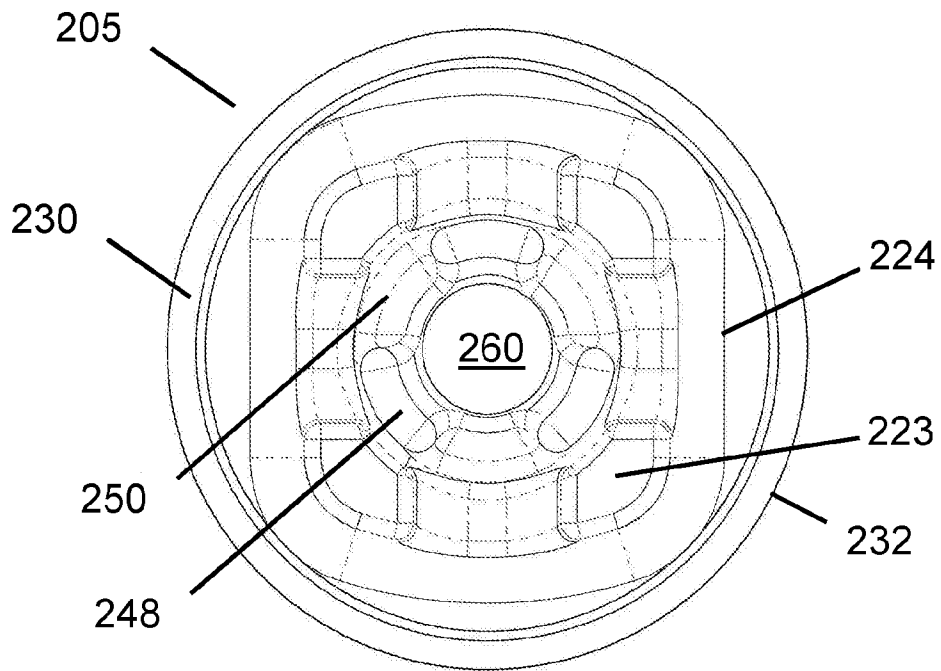


Figure 6a

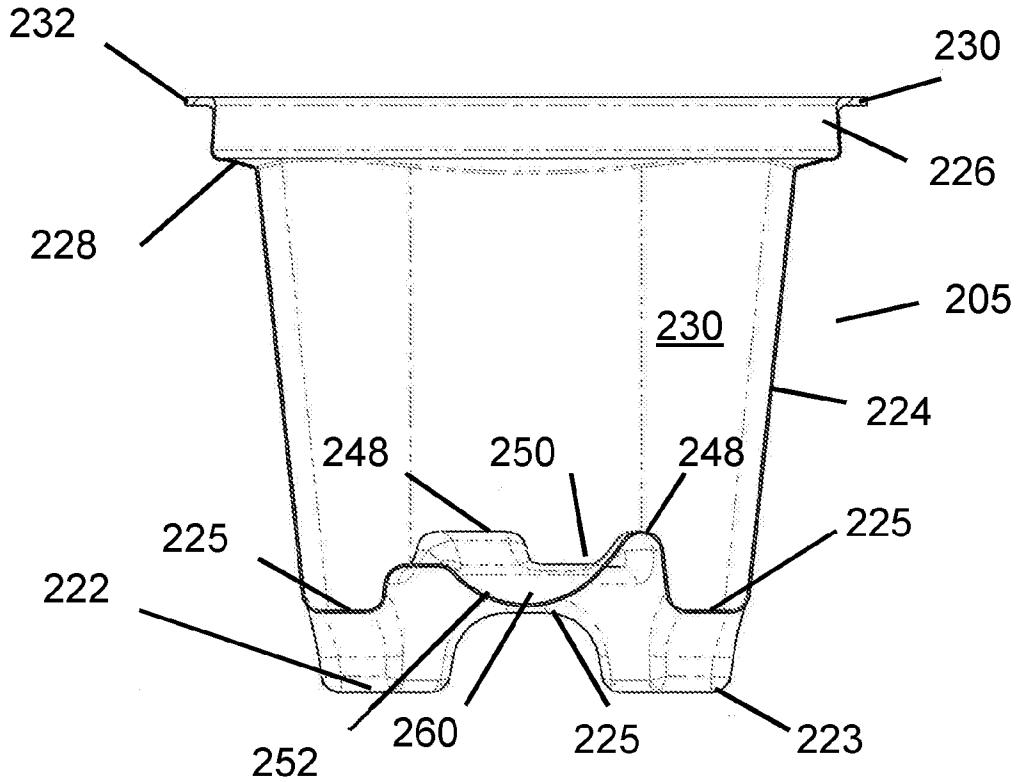


Figure 6b

9/16

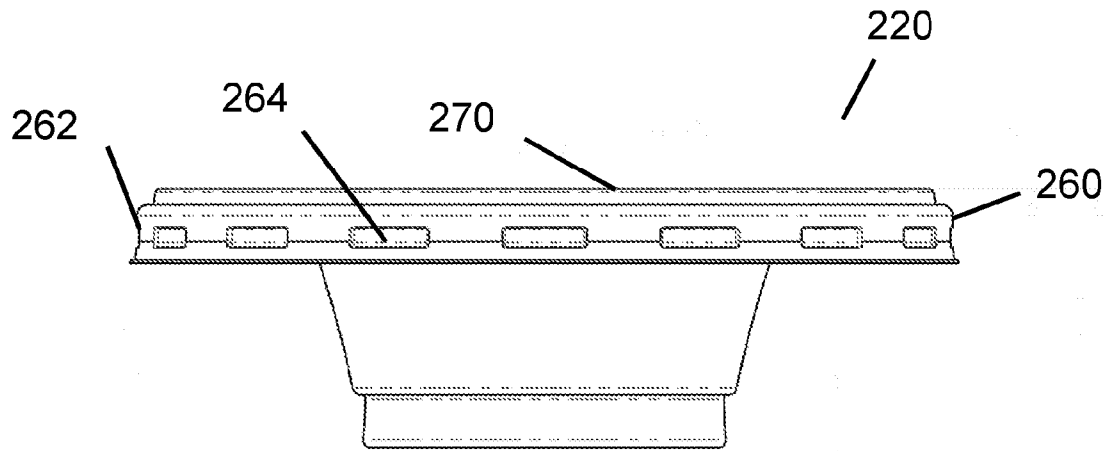


Figure 7a

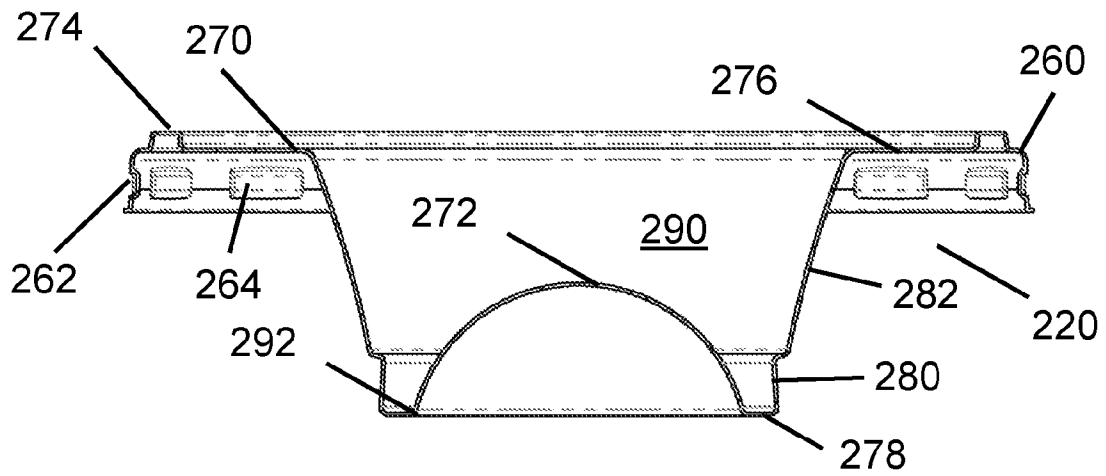
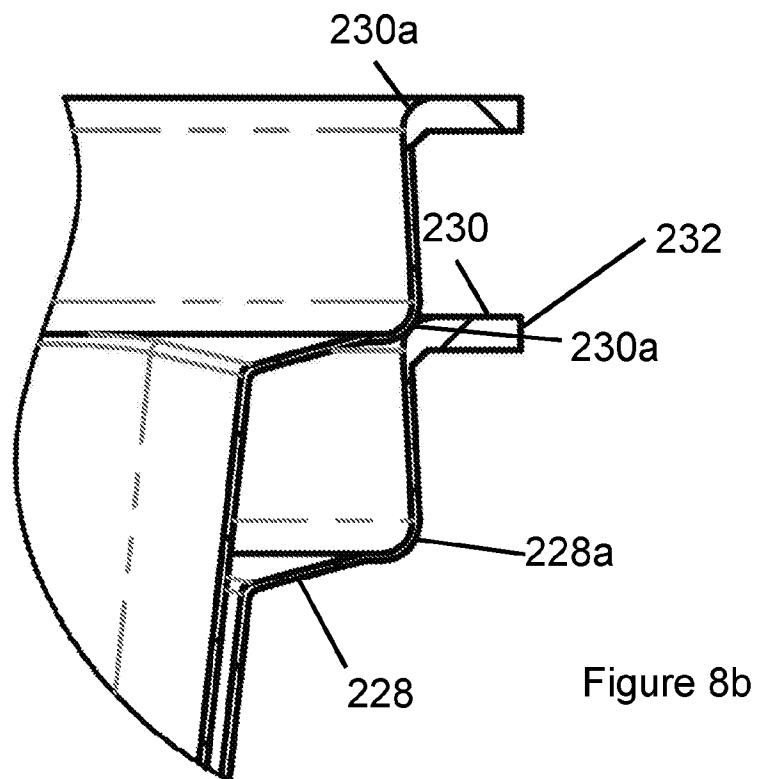
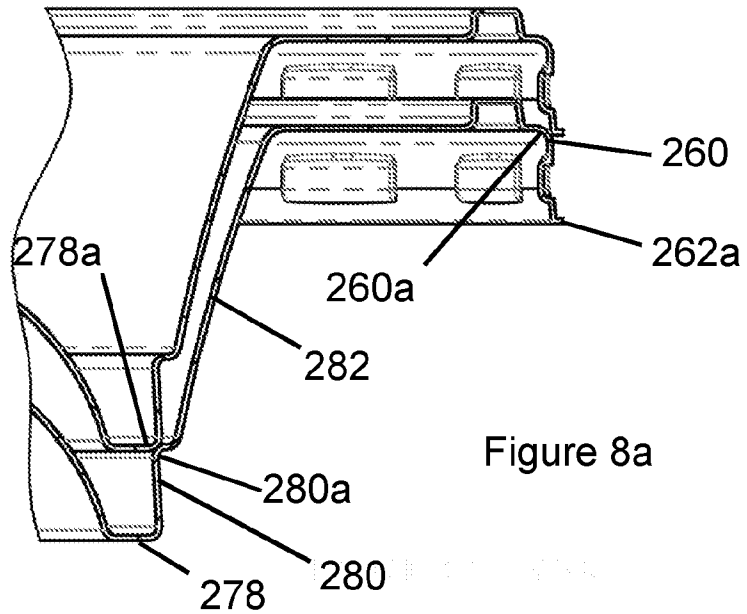


Figure 7b

10/16



11/16

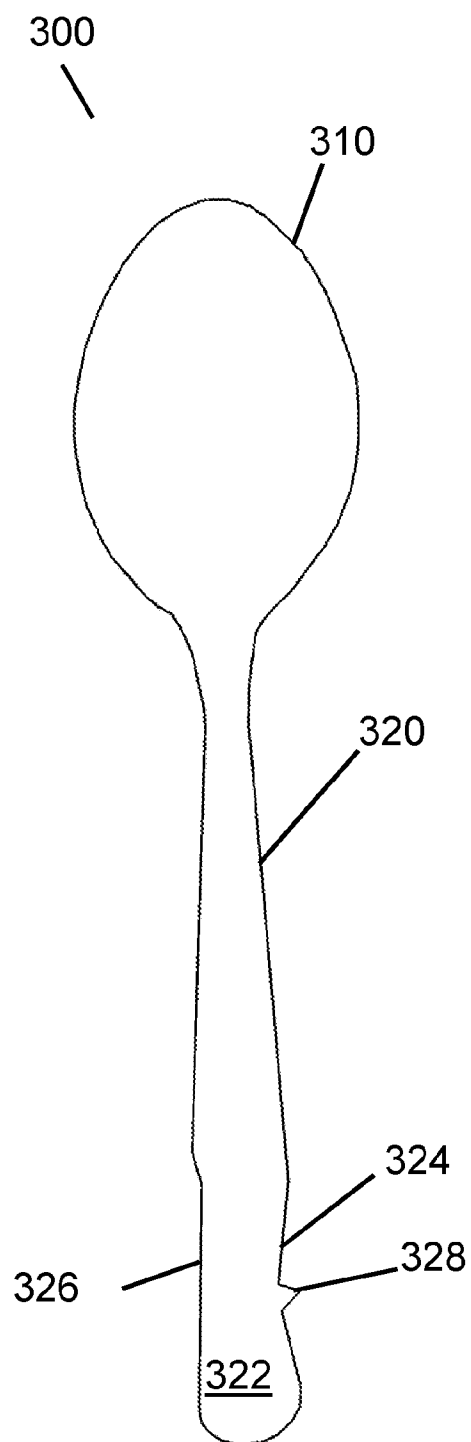


Figure 9a

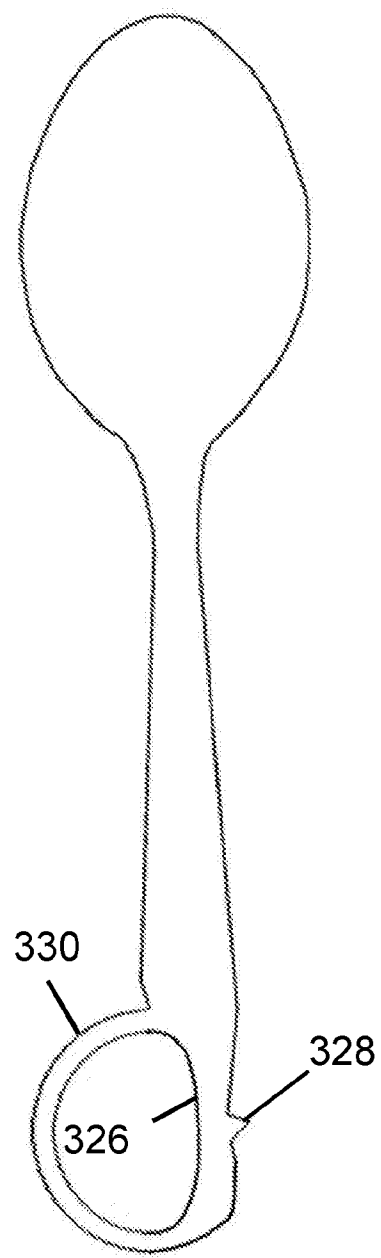


Figure 9b

12/16

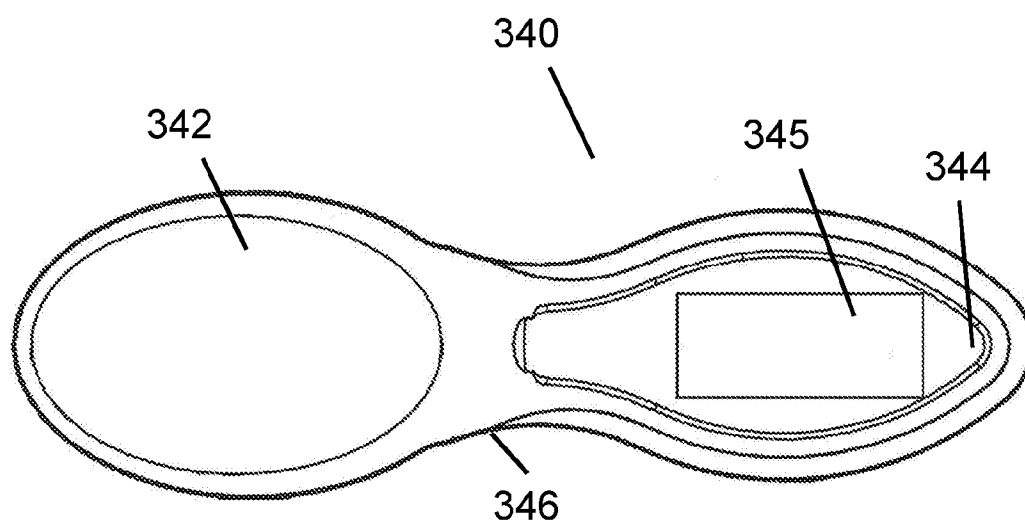


Figure 10a



Figure 10b

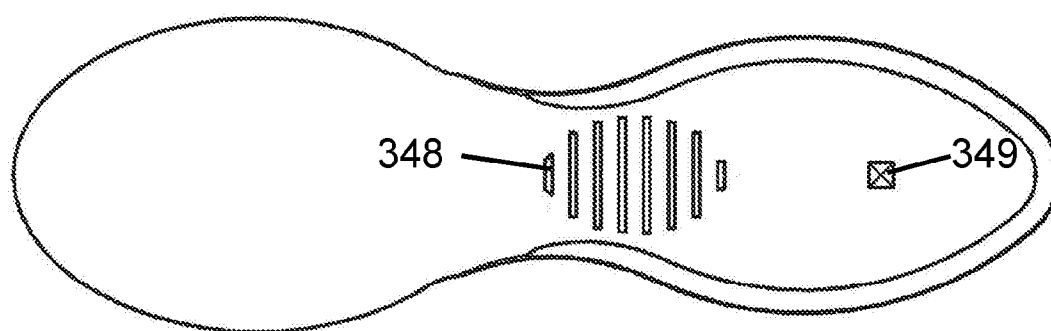


Figure 10c

13/16

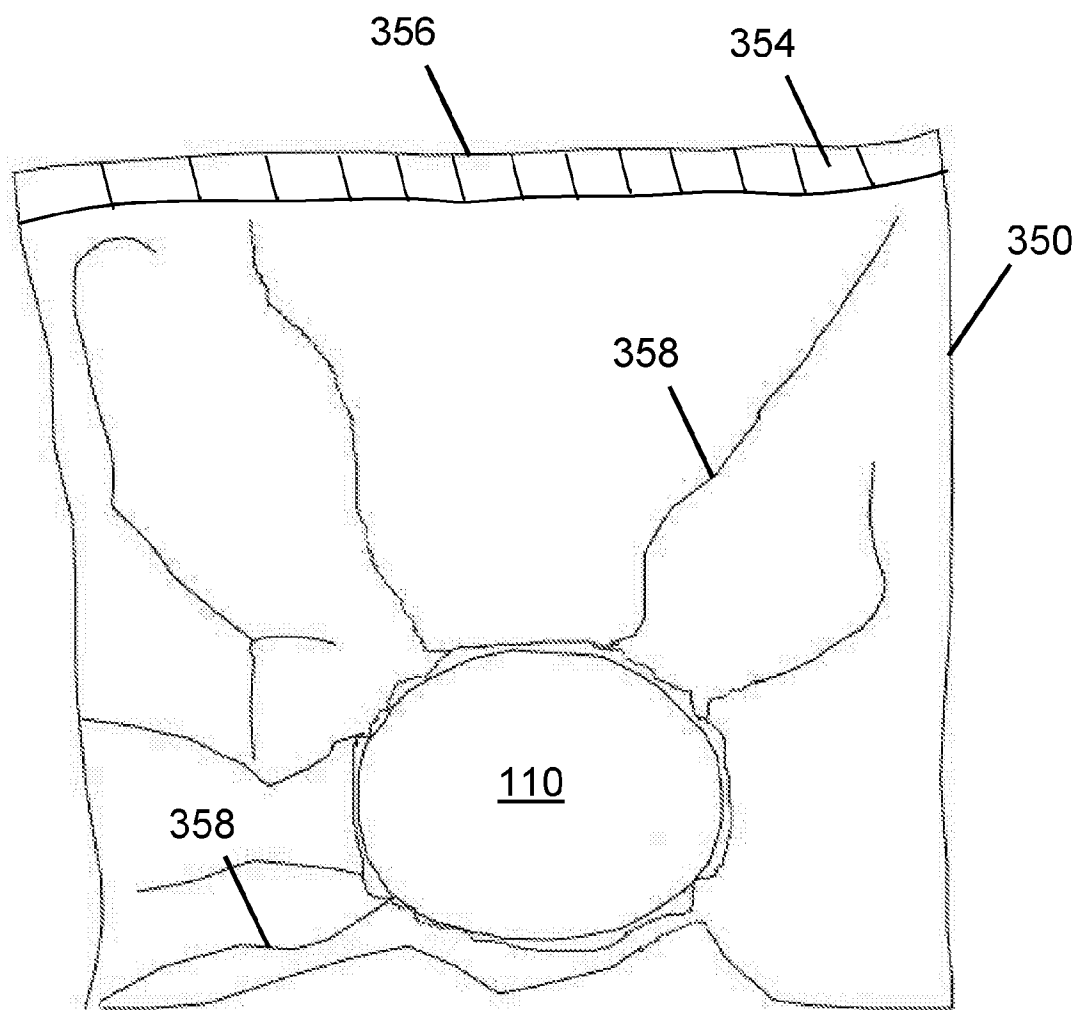


Figure 11a

14/16

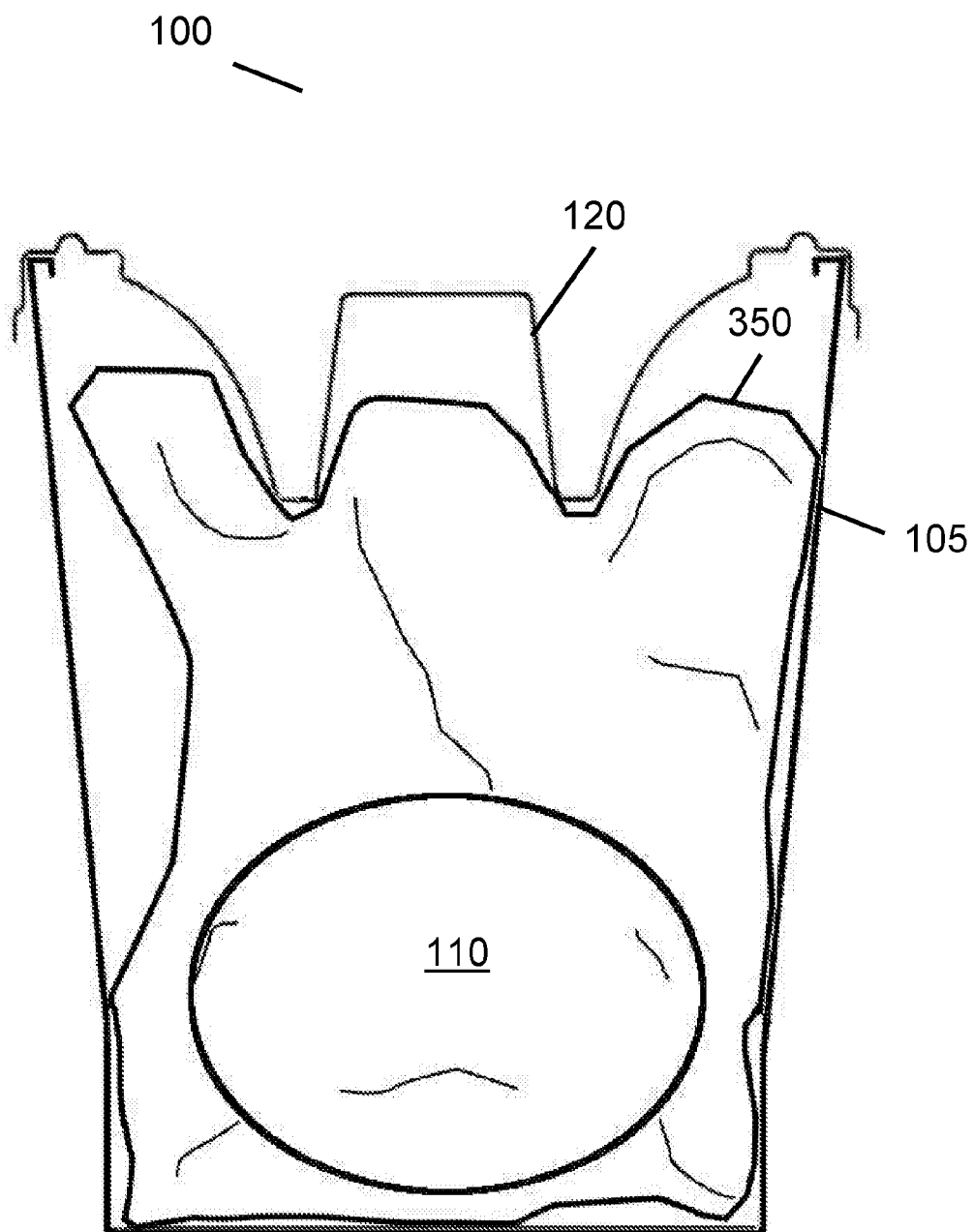


Figure 11b

15/16

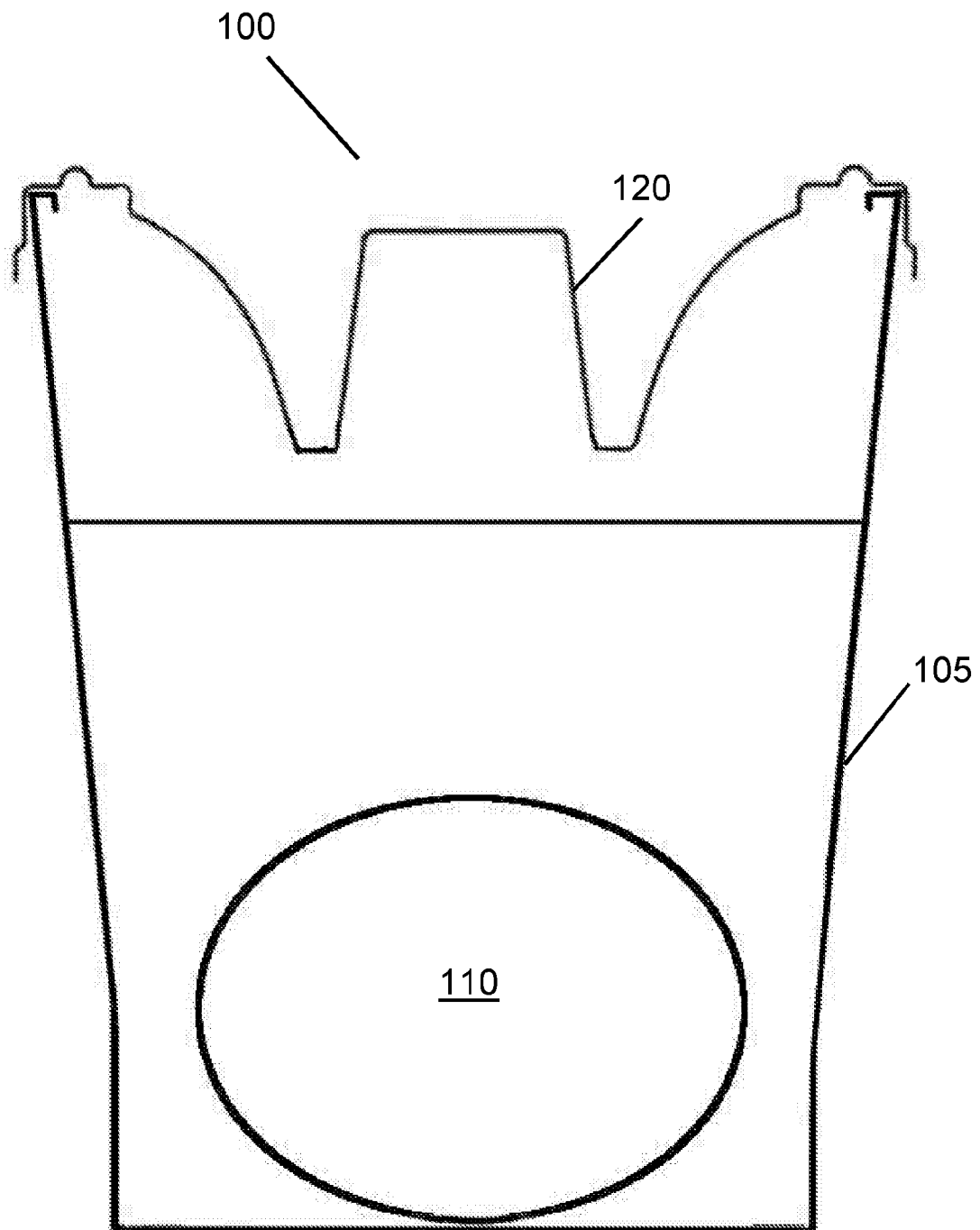


Figure 12

16/16

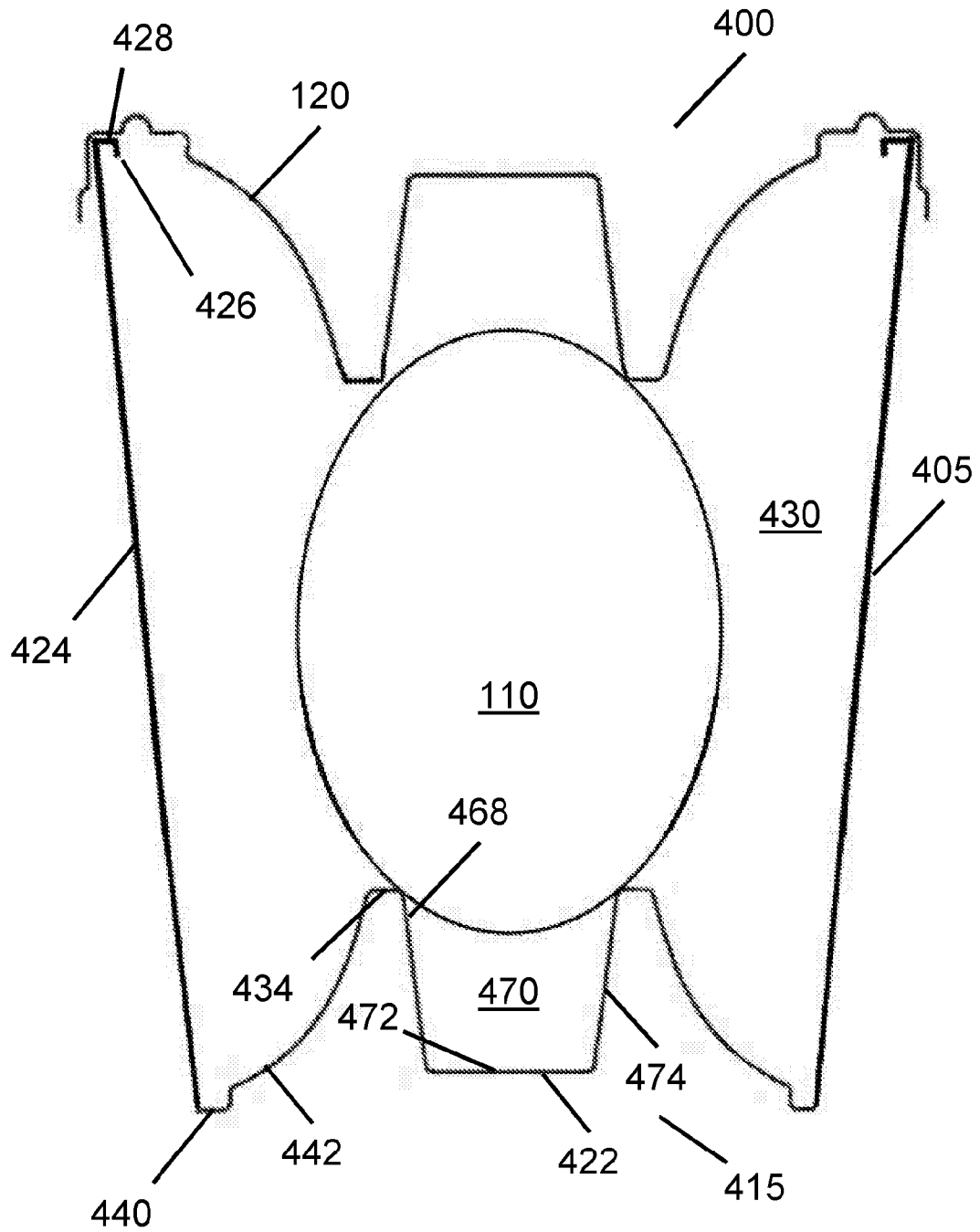


Figure 13