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(12) **United States Patent**
Silver

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(54) **ARTIFICIAL NIPPLE**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 1167 days.

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(22) Filed: **Oct. 29, 2003**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

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Related U.S. Application Data

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(51) **Int. Cl.**
A61J 11/00 (2006.01)
A61J 11/04 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **215/11.1**; 215/11.5

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 215/11.1, 215/11.5; 604/234, 236; 606/234, 236
See application file for complete search history.

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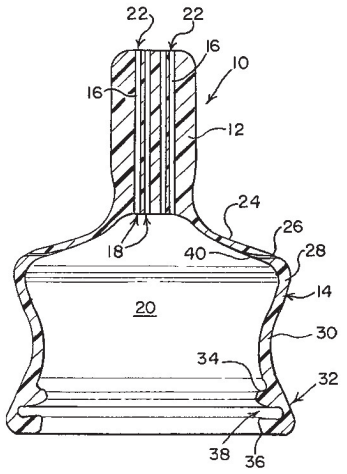
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

An artificial baby-feeding nipple including a substantially solid nipple portion with one or more ducts formed therethrough for conveying fluids through the nipple. The nipple is radially compressible so as to prevent passage of fluids through the one or more ducts when so compressed through use of a material having a low durometer material.

23 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



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FIG. 1

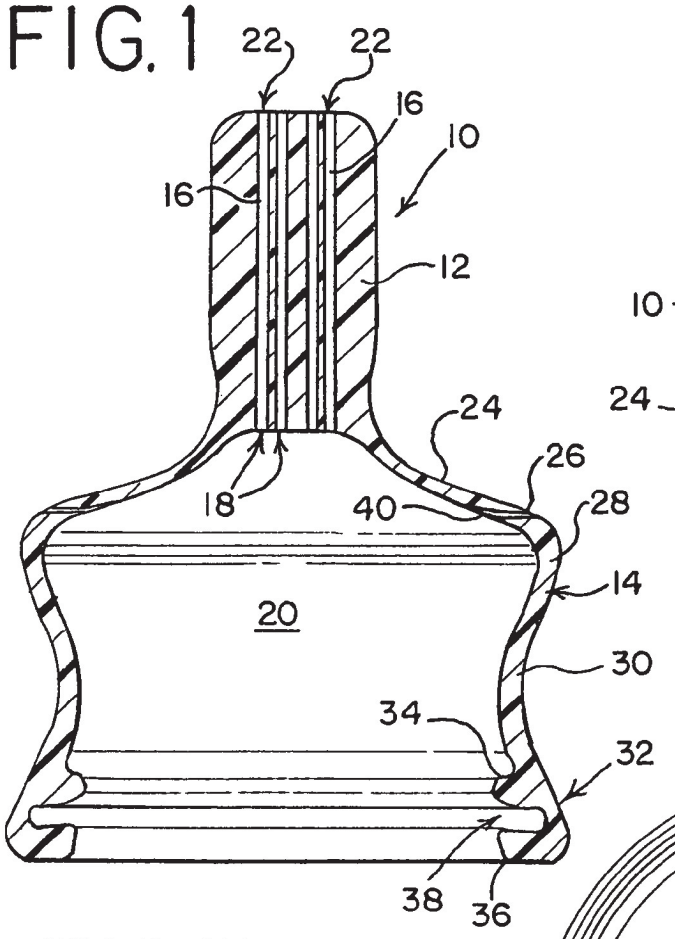


FIG. 1A

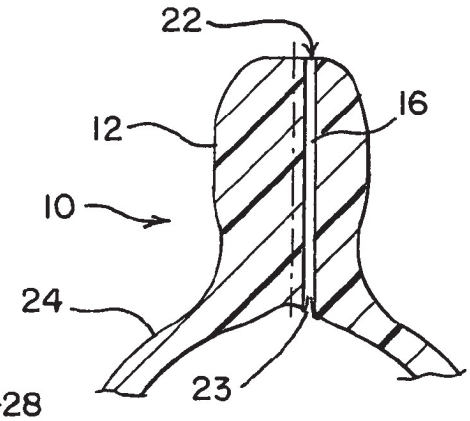


FIG. 2

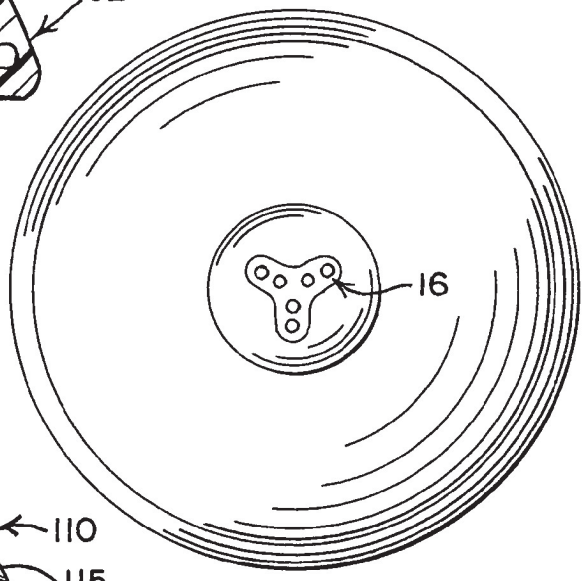


FIG. 3

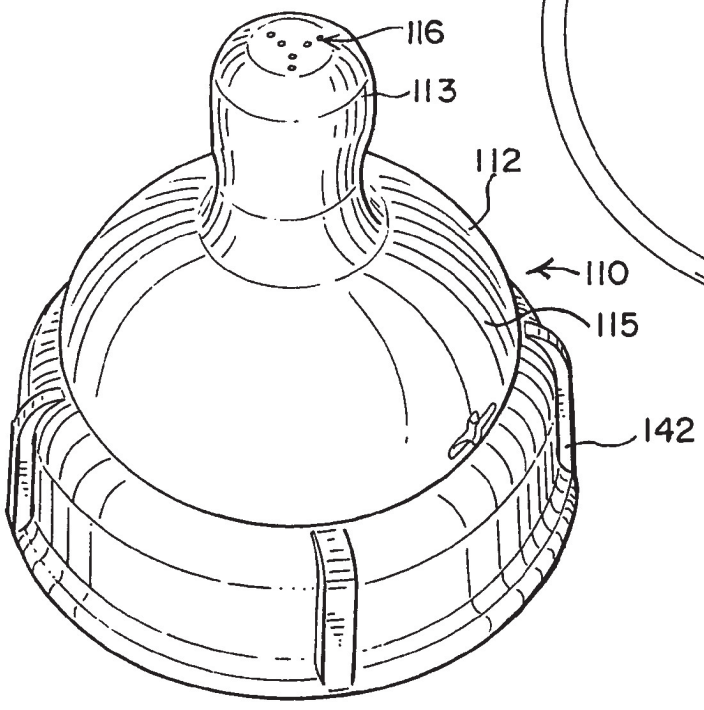


FIG. 4

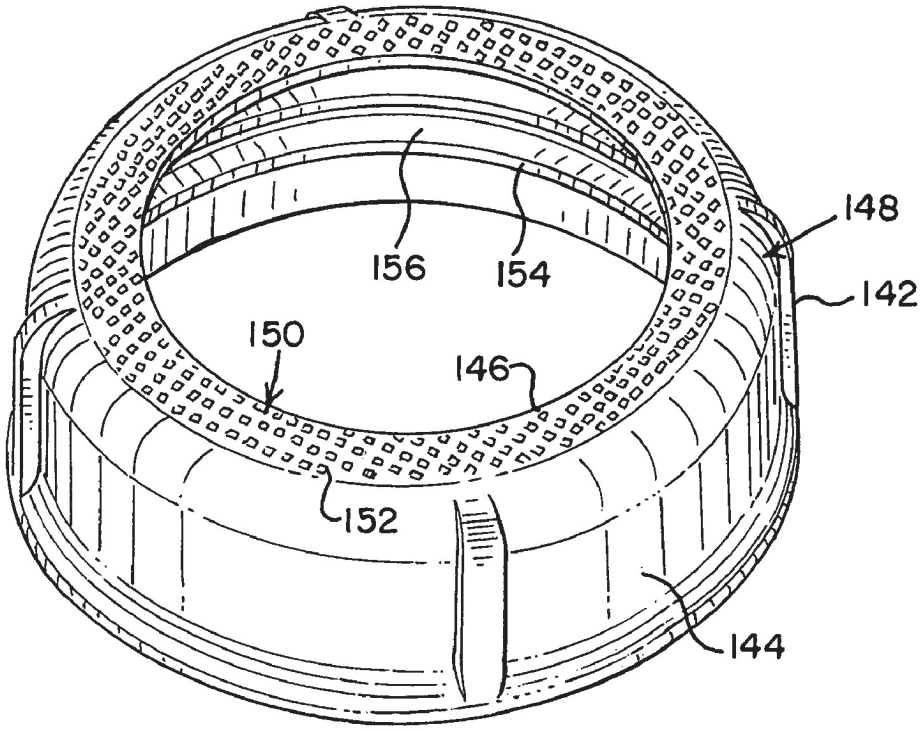


FIG. 5

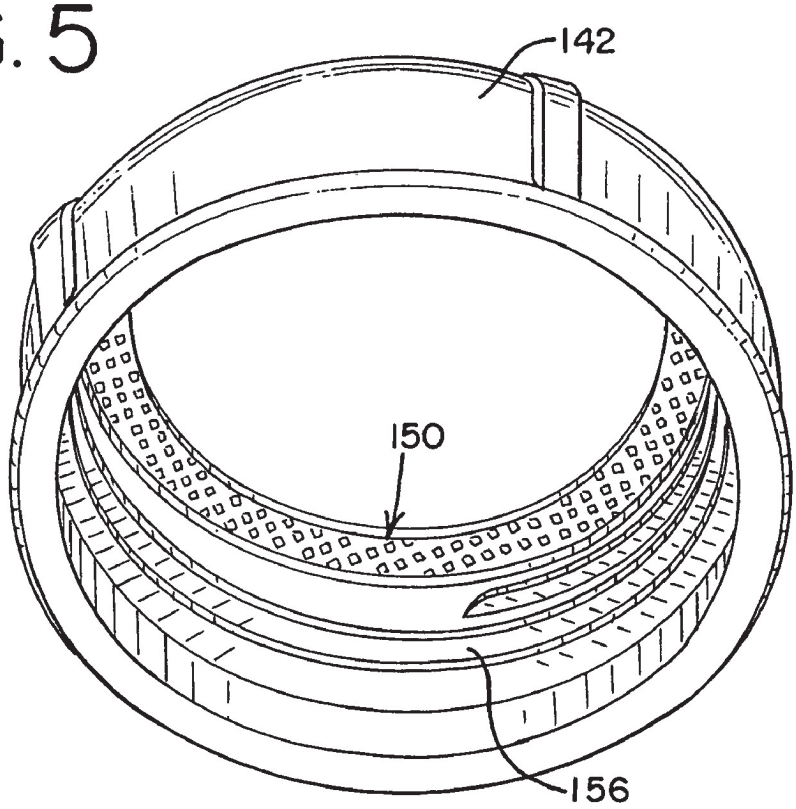


FIG.6

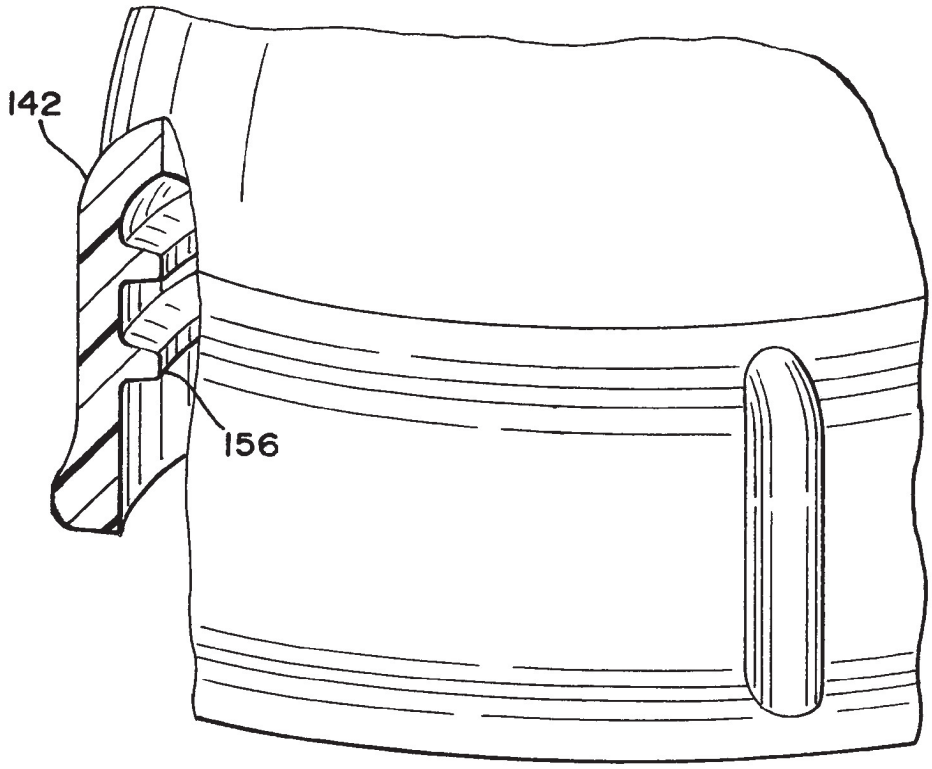


FIG.7

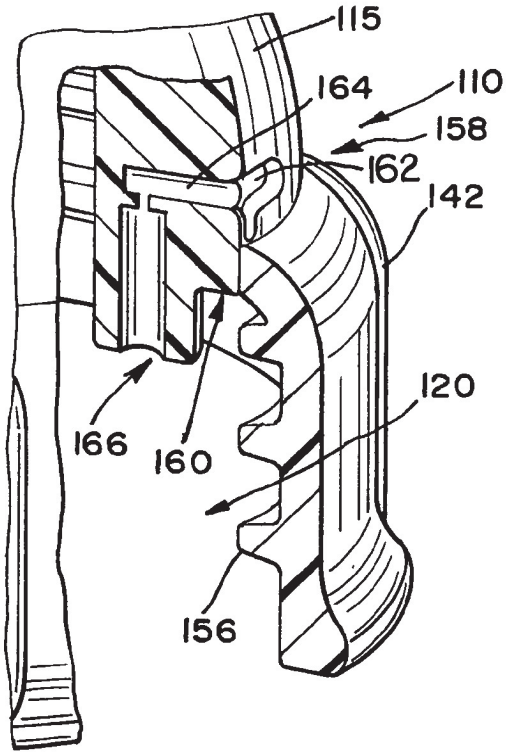
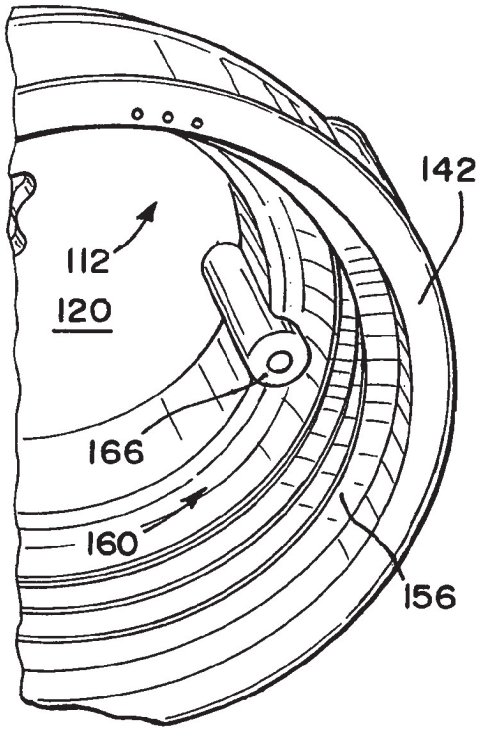


FIG.8



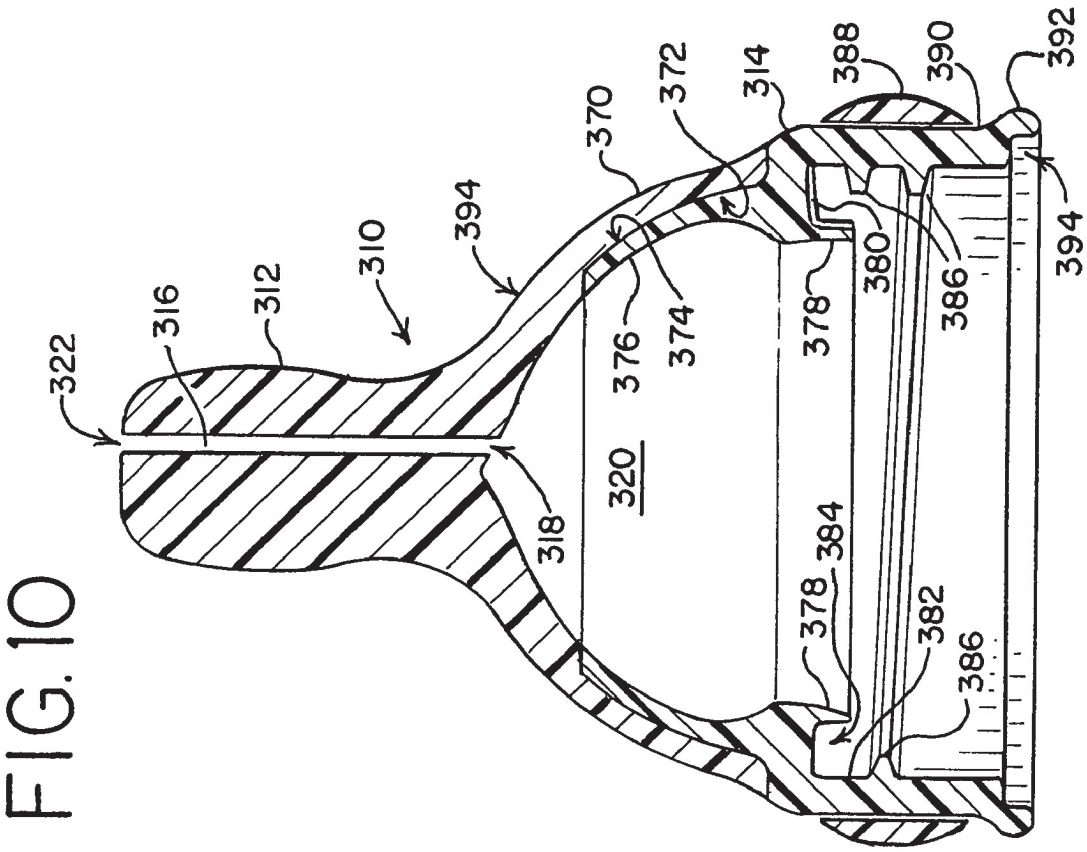

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FIG. 10

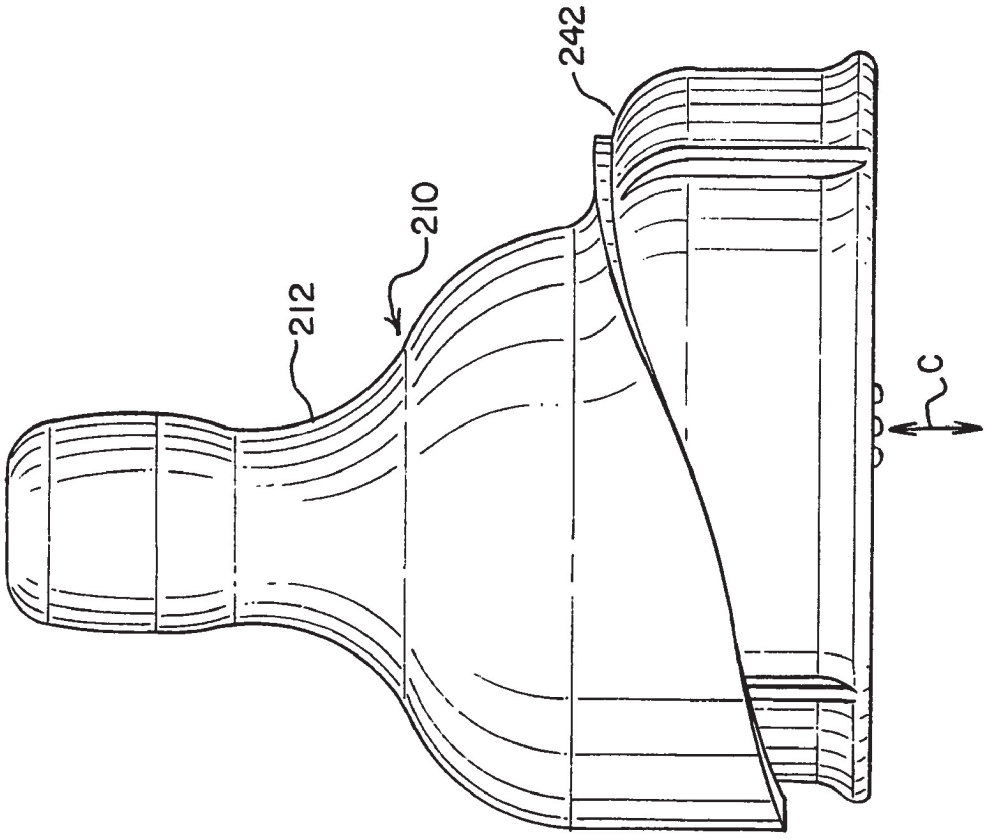

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FIG. 9

FIG. 11

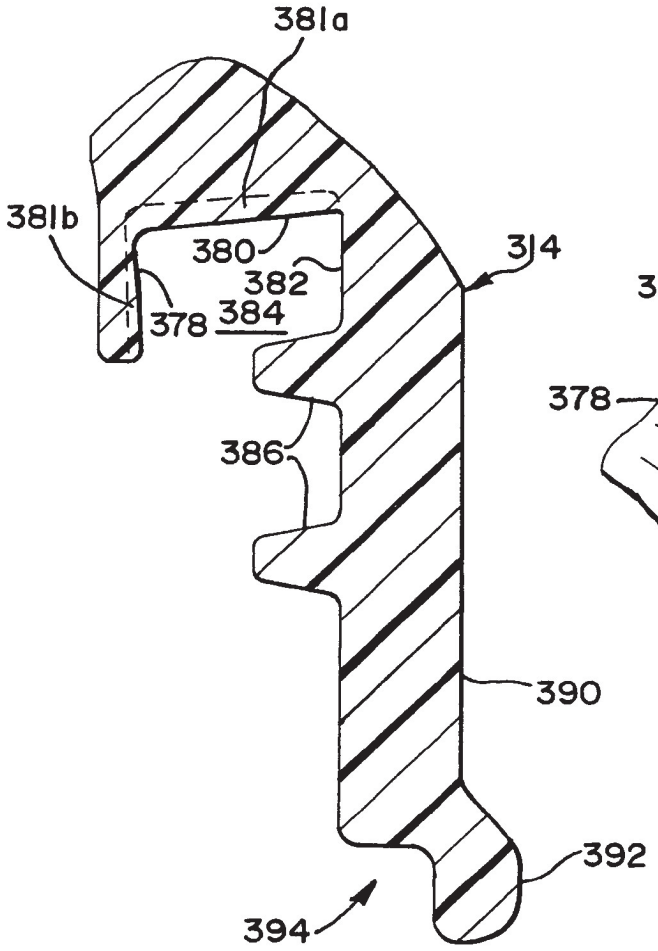


FIG. 11A

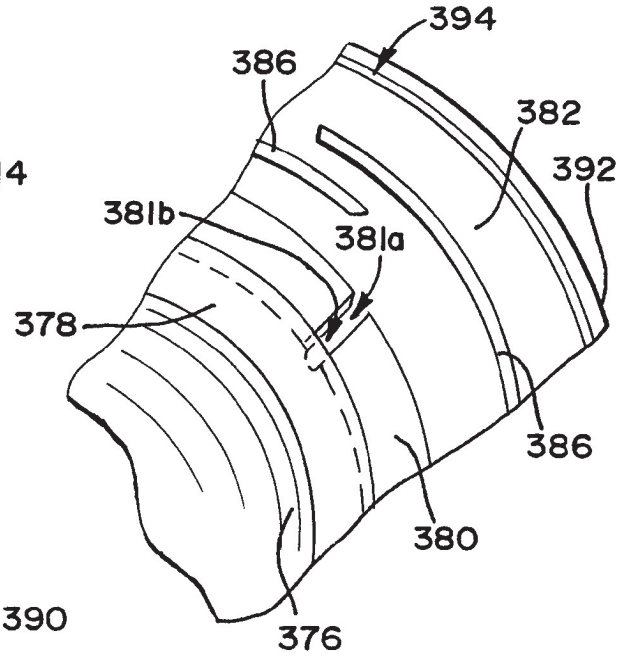


FIG. 12

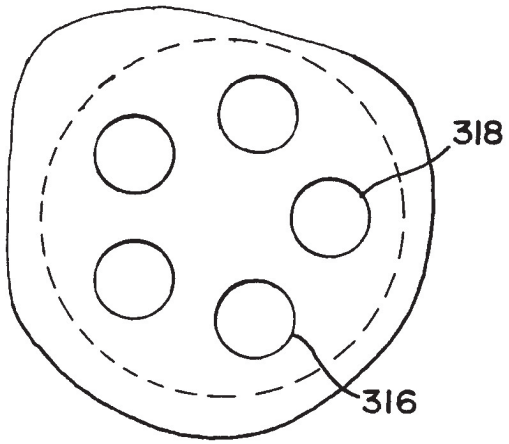


FIG. 13

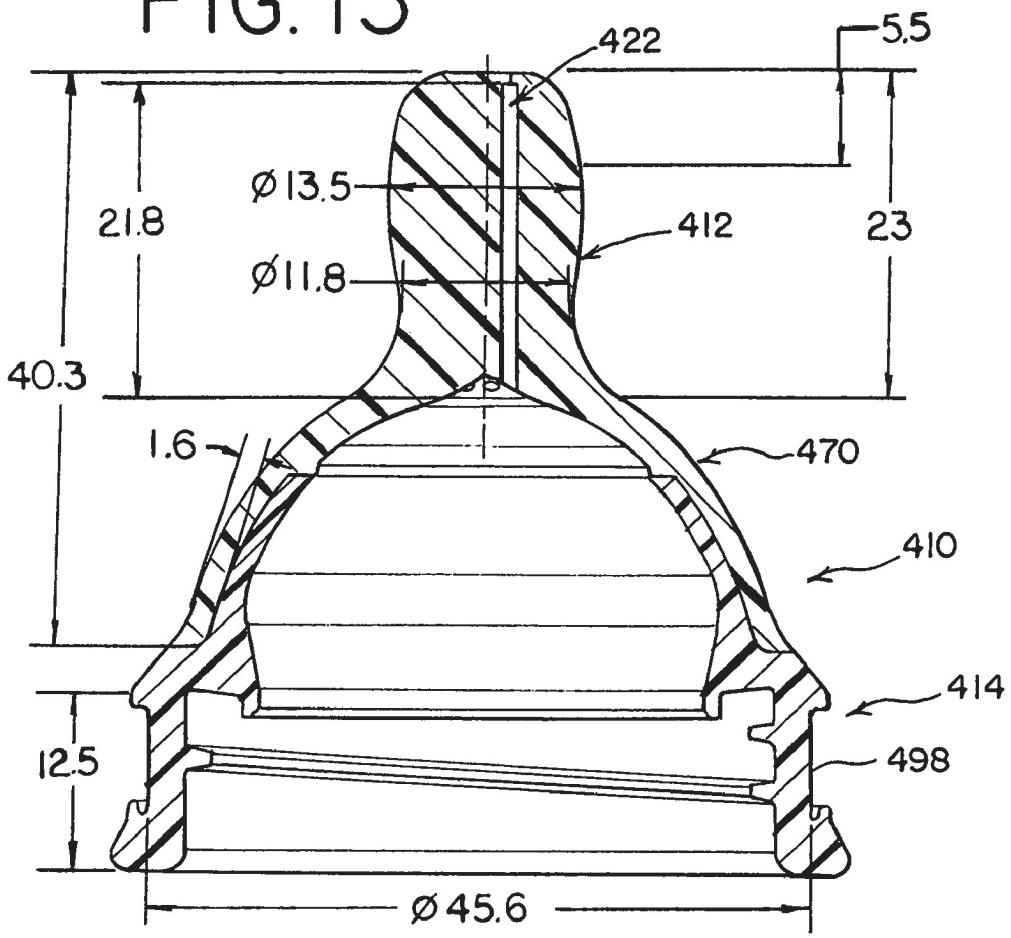


FIG. 14

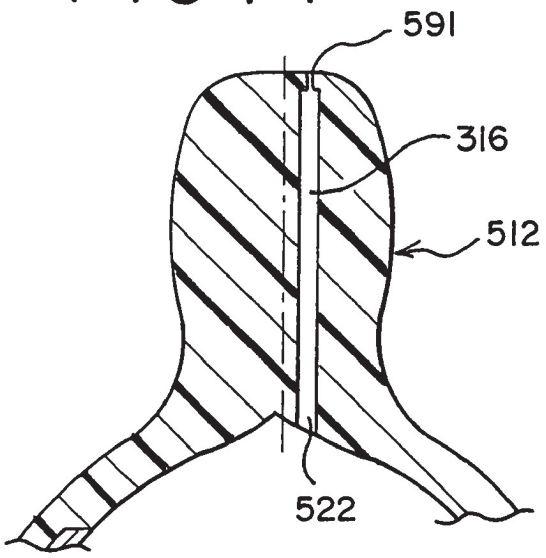


FIG. 15

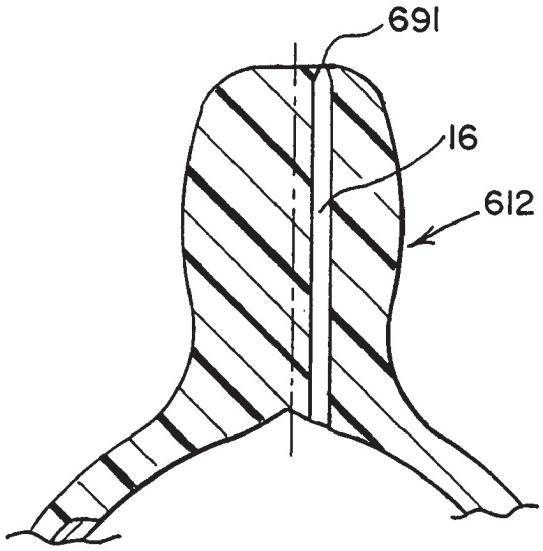


FIG. 16A

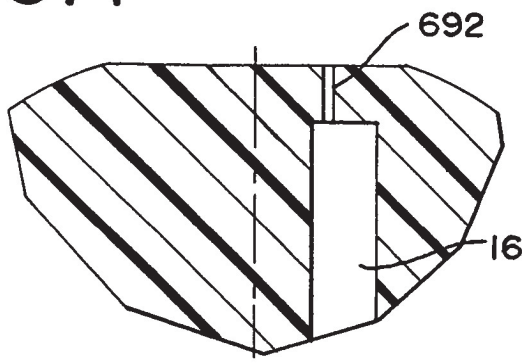


FIG. 16B

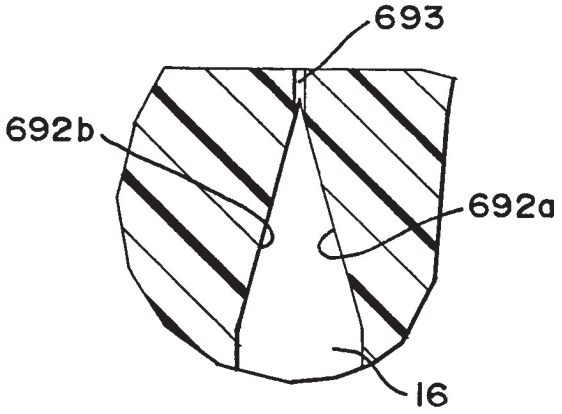


FIG. 16C

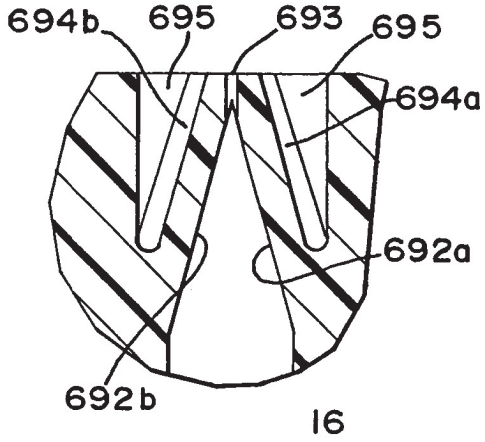


FIG. 17A

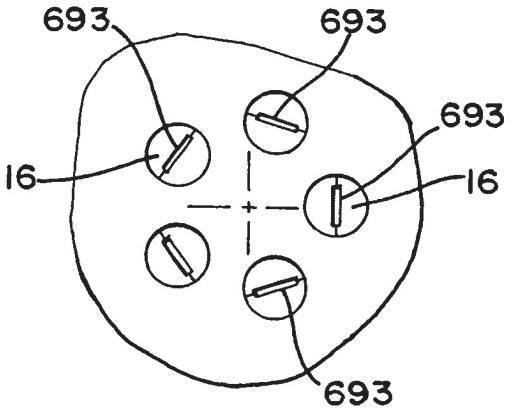
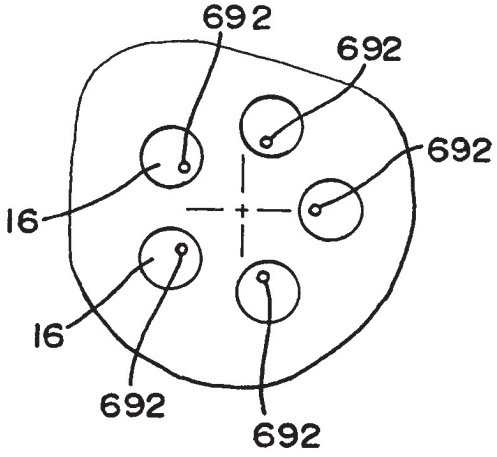


FIG. 17B



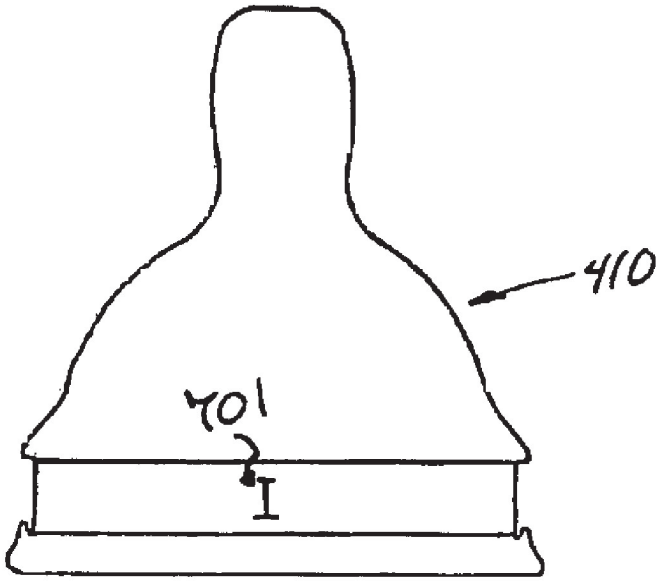


FIG.18A

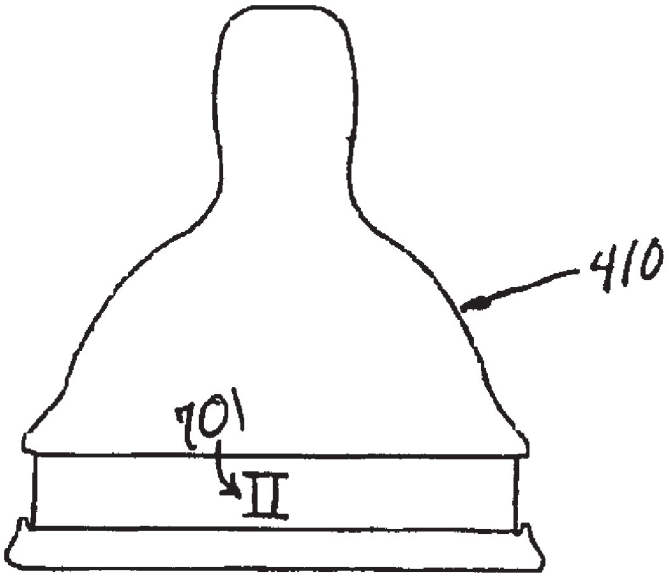


FIG.18B

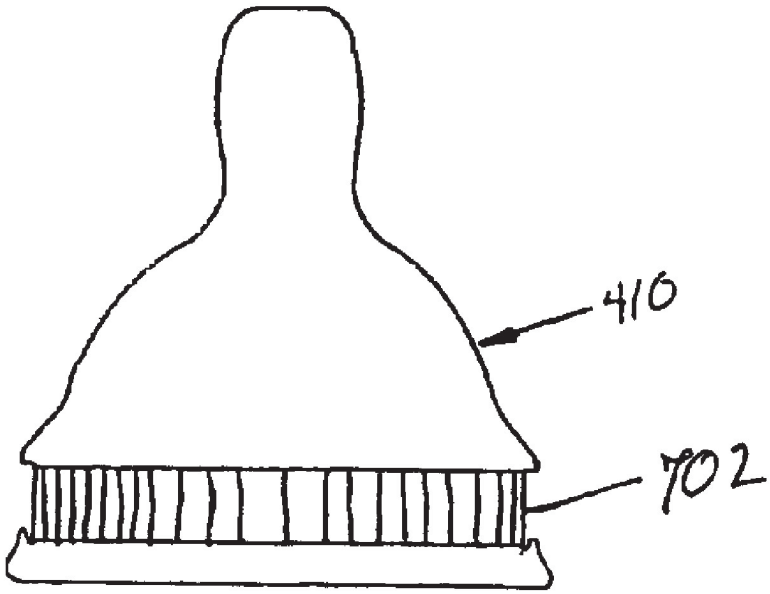


FIG.18C

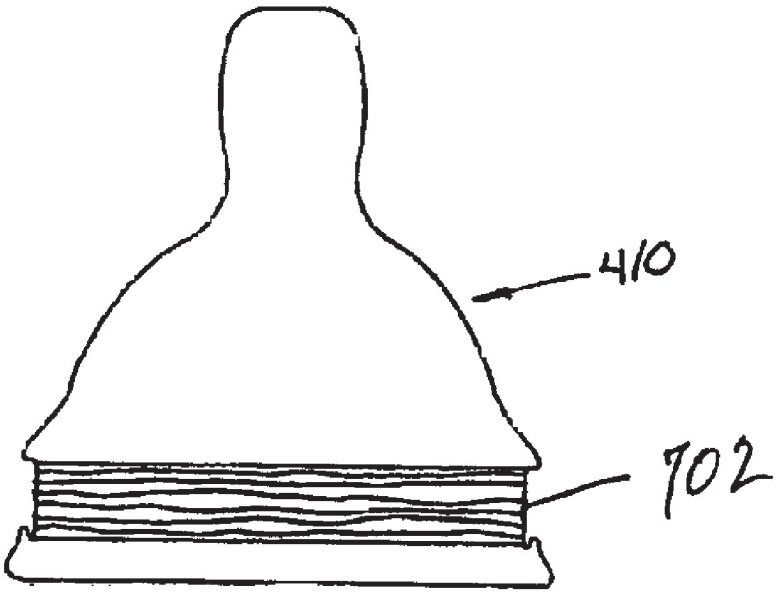


FIG.18D

ARTIFICIAL NIPPLE

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/424,954 filed Nov. 8, 2002.

FIELD OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

The present invention generally relates to an artificial nipple for use with a bottle for the purpose of feeding, such as an infant.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The merits of breast-feeding are well documented in the scientific literature. A number of advantages have been noted which include nutritional, immunological, psychological and other general health advantages. A list of the merits of human breast milk as compared to artificial feed or formula would include ideal nutritional content, better absorption, fewer food related allergies, more favorable psychological development, better immunological defenses, and a substantial economic advantage. Another benefit to exclusive breast-feeding includes positive effects on development of an infant's oral cavity resulting in proper alignment of teeth and other related benefits.

For various reasons, however, exclusive breast-feeding is not always possible. An example of this would be where a nursing mother cannot produce enough breast milk to feed her infant. In such cases, an artificial feed may be used to supplement breast-feeding. A nursing mother returning to work may employ a breast pump to express milk to be given to her infant at a later time. In the event that an infant is fed with an artificial formula or previously expressed breast milk, it is conventional that a bottle provided with an artificial nipple is used to feed the infant.

The mechanical aspects of breast-feeding are significantly different compared to that of bottle-feeding. In breast-fed babies, the tongue action appears to be of rolling or peristaltic motion. However, the tongue action for bottle-fed babies is often considered to be more piston-like or a squeezing motion. In order to stop the abundant flow of milk from a bottle with an artificial nipple having a large hole in the end, infants might be forced to hold the tongue up against the hole of the nipple to prevent the formula from gushing forth. This abnormal activity of the tongue is referred to as tongue thrust or deviate swallow. When breast-fed babies are not sucking or swallowing, they may rest with the nipple moderately indented by the tongue, while bottle-fed babies rest with the teat expanded, i.e., indenting the tongue. The differences between the tongue movements and rest position of the tongue and breast-fed and bottle-fed babies are probably due to the properties of the artificial nipple.

The undesirable effects of existing artificial nipples are often permanent and correction later in life is difficult due at least in part to effected muscle development. The shape of a breast nipple is dictated by the internal geometry of the infant's mouth during breast-feeding. However, an artificial teat is already formed with a specific shape and is made from a material stiffer than breast tissue.

Recent research suggests that in the early stages of oral cavity development, the palette is almost as malleable as softened wax. As a result, children who are bottle-fed are nearly twice as likely to have malocclusions as children who are breast-fed. In the same way that finger sucking and use of a pacifier-like object has been found to increase the prevalence of malocclusions it is now believed that use of a conventional artificial nipple also impacts negatively upon formation of the oral cavity.

A demand therefore exists for an artificial nipple that more closely mimics that of a natural breast and reduces or eliminates the impact of bottle-feeding with respect to oral development. The present invention is believed to satisfy this demand.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An object of the invention is to provide an artificial nipple that is made of a material that minimally impacts infant oral development. Another object of the invention is to provide an artificial nipple that permits milk to flow therefrom at typical breast-feeding suction levels. Yet another object of the invention is to provide an artificial nipple that does not permit milk to flow through or substantially stops that flow when compressed, or constricted radially through elongation. Still yet another object of the invention is to provide an artificial nipple that is positioned in the oral cavity in a similar fashion as that of a mother's nipple. Another object of the invention is to provide an artificial nipple that permits milk or other fluids to flow therefrom in a manner and rate similar to that of a mother's nipple.

Overall, the nipple of the present invention is designed in one broad sense to encourage a suck/swallow/breathe pattern similar to that of natural breastfeeding. This reduces or eliminates the undesired forcing of breast milk to a feeding infant.

In one aspect of the present invention, a baby feeding apparatus includes a substantially solid nipple with one or more ducts formed therethrough for conveying fluids through the nipple. The nipple is radially compressible so as to prevent passage of fluids through the one or more ducts when so compressed. Similarly, the nipple constricts radially so as to prevent passage of fluids when elongated (stretched).

In a particular aspect of the foregoing invention, the nipple may be a Shore A hardness of less than about 10, and even below 1. More particularly, on the Shore 00 scale, a range of about 20 to about 45 is presently considered most desirable. The nipple may include three or more elongated ducts. The fluid ducts may further be offset radially with respect to a central axis of the nipple in another variation. Further still, the end openings of the ducts can be radially offset relative to the central axis of the ducts themselves.

In one embodiment, the nipple may include a unitary nipple portion and mounting portion. The mounting portion may be formed of a material having the same Shore A hardness as that of the nipple portion, but in this embodiment, the mounting portion may be formed of a material having a relatively higher Shore A hardness to that of the nipple portion. This provides a more rigid structure for attachment to a container, for instance.

In another form, the nipple may include a nipple end and a body portion. The body portion may include a vent formed therethrough, or multiple vents. The vent may include a horizontal passageway in communication with atmosphere, and a vertical passageway in communication at a first end to the horizontal passageway and at a second end to an inner chamber of the nipple.

Another aspect of the invention provides a baby feeding apparatus including a substantially solid nipple being formed of a material having a Shore A hardness of less than about 10, and one or more ducts at or near the nipple tip for conveying fluids through the nipple, and most preferably extending through the generally solid nipple portion.

Yet another aspect of the invention provides a baby feeding apparatus including a substantially solid nipple having one or more ducts formed therethrough for conveying fluids through the nipple, and a flow restrictive feature. One flow restrictive

feature prevents passage of fluids through the one or more ducts when the nipple is one or both of radially compressed and axially extended. Another is just the small size of the terminal hole at the end of a duct as disclosed herein, which is sufficient alone to restrict fluid flow, as well as the use of a valve or valve-like end feature. It has been observed that these flow restrictive features reduce the amount of air that could otherwise return to the fluid container. With the vented structure disclosed herein, this serves to prevent the infant (user) from taking in unwanted air with feeding. The ducts may be round in cross-section. In another embodiment, the ducts may terminate in longitudinal slits. In yet another embodiment, the ducts may terminate in "S"-shaped slits or "Y"-shaped slits.

Yet another aspect of the invention provides an integral (one-piece) nursing nipple including a substantially solid nipple formed of a material having a Shore A hardness of less than about 10, and a container attachment portion formed to be unitary with the nipple portion.

Yet another aspect of the invention provides an integral nursing nipple including a substantially solid nipple portion formed of a material having a Shore A hardness of less than about 10, and an extending elongated portion sized and shaped to be insertable into the mouth of a nursing infant. The extending portion includes a proximal portion and a base portion and one or more ducts through the solid nipple portion from the proximal portion to the base portion. The base portion has a radial flange extending outwardly therefrom, and a container attachment portion formed to be unitary with the nipple portion. The container attachment portion is generally cylindrical, and has a first end connected to the radial flange and a second end. The second end includes an internal groove formed about an internal periphery thereof. The internal groove is sized and shaped so as to be removably attachable to a container having a matching thread (although this mating thread and groove arrangement could be reversed).

Yet another aspect of the present invention provides an integral nursing nipple including a substantially solid nipple formed of a material having a Shore A hardness of less than about 10, and an extending portion sized and shaped to be insertable into the mouth of a nursing infant. The extending portion includes one or more ducts extending therethrough for conveying fluids, and a base portion. A container attachment portion is attached to the base portion. The container attachment portion is generally cylindrical and has a first end with a flange. The flange extends inwardly from the first end and includes a plurality of openings formed therethrough. In manufacture the soft base portion enmeshes with the flange through the openings. The container attachment portion includes means for attachment to a container, such as screw threads, a snap-fit, etc.

Another aspect of one embodiment of the invention is to provide as low a Durometer material for the nipple portion of the artificial nipple as possible. Preferably, a relatively higher durometer material is provided for the collar portion. The nipple portion may be molded or connected directly to the collar or mounting portion or may be a more conventional nipple/collar configuration.

Still another aspect of an embodiment of the invention is the positioning of a valve at the distal end of each duct to regulate the flow of fluids through each duct. The valve is designed to open and close depending on the suckling action.

One of the most significant attributes of the present invention is nonetheless considered to be the very low Durometer material of the nipple extending portion, and how that material behaves under manipulation by the infant in suckling, both in extension and also in compression. The elongated duct(s) in the preferred substantially solid embodiment appear to react much more like a mother's nipple than any prior art artificial nipple with this very low Durometer material. The infant also is believed to engage the soft area surrounding and extending outwardly from the distal end of the extending portion in a manner much more reminiscent of feeding at the breast. Furthermore, and unlike many prior art artificial nipples, the present invention permits the fluid flow characteristics of the nipple to respond to changes in vacuum. It is believed that the low Durometer material of the nipple, possibly in combination with other features of the present invention, can be tailored to allow a higher fluid flow rate at a relatively increased vacuum (by the infant).

As will be evident herein, the most preferred durometers are considered to be in the range at or below about Shore A 5, which would be most preferably around Shore 00 20 to 45. Even below the latter range may be useful.

Another way to look at the desired result in this nipple insofar as extension and compression under suckling, is through the elongation of the nipple material. Materials that have appeared very useful for the elongated portion of the nipple have shown a stress of approximately 40 psi or less at 300% elongation in a most preferred embodiment.

These, together with other objects and advantages will be further understood in the details of the construction and operation of the invention as more fully hereinafter described, reference being had to the accompanying drawings, forming a part hereof, wherein like numerals refer to like part throughout.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is a sectional view of one embodiment of a nipple according to the present invention;

FIG. **1**A is an enlarged view of ducts with valves in a variation of the nipple of FIG. **1**;

FIG. **2** is a reduced-size bottom view of the nipple of FIG. **1**;

FIG. **3** is a perspective view of a second embodiment of an integral nipple according to the present invention;

FIG. **4** is a top perspective view of the collar portion of the nipple of FIG. **3**;

FIG. **5** is a bottom perspective view of the collar portion of FIG. **4**;

FIG. **6** is an enlarged and partially sectional illustration of a portion of the nipple of FIG. **3**;

FIG. **7** is an enlarged and partially sectional illustration of another portion of the nipple of FIG. **3**;

FIG. **8** is an enlarged bottom perspective view of the nipple of FIG. **3**;

FIG. **9** is a perspective view of a third embodiment of an integral nipple according to the present invention;

FIG. **10** is a sectional view of a fourth embodiment of a nipple according to the present invention;

FIG. **11** is an enlarged partial sectional view of a mounting portion of the nipple of FIG. **10**;

FIG. **11** A is a partial cut-away perspective view showing the vent of FIG. **11**;

FIG. **12** is a bottom view of one embodiment of an arrangement of fluid ducts according to the present invention;

FIG. **13** is a sectional view of an embodiment of a nipple similar to that shown in FIG. **10**, illustrating some of the nipple dimensions;

FIG. **14** is an enlarged partial sectional view of the nipple of FIG. **10**;

FIG. **15** is an enlarged partial sectional view of another embodiment of the nipple of FIG. **10**;

FIGS. **16**A-**16**C are sectional views of various types of termini for ducts;

FIGS. **17**A-**17**B are end views of nipples formed with the foregoing termini, and

FIGS. **18**A-**18**D shows indicia and color coding elements on the nipple of FIG. **13**.

DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

FIG. **1** shows an embodiment of a nipple, illustrated generally at **10**, for use with a container, such as a bottle or bag. The nipple **10** may be made of any suitable material, but in a preferred form is made of a silicone material, such as silicone rubber. Preferably, the nipple material may be silicone, but could alternatively be other materials, such as thermoplastic elastomers (TPE's), such as polyisoprene, and others compatible for nursing.

It will be noted that, while described in the environment of human infant feed, the invention has broader application to animal feeding, providing fluids to non-infants, and so on.

The nipple **10** here is formed of two subparts including a substantially solid nipple portion **12** at a proximal end thereof for insertion into an infant's mouth and for conveying fluids therethrough from an attached bottle (not shown). Proximal and distal, being indicative terms, are chosen here with respect to the user (e.g., the infant). The nipple portion is a generally cylindrical substantially solid body. However, it is understood that the nipple can be in other shapes such as "orthodontic" designs. The term "substantially solid", for purposes of the present application, is broadly defined as a range from completely solid (i.e., including no voids or hollows except for the existence of one or more generally narrow ducts for conveying fluid), to having a hollow interior defined by sidewalls that include one or more ducts formed therethrough where the ducts have a significantly greater longitudinal length than radial width. As will be appreciated, there are certain functional attributes for the "solid" nipple portion **12** of this aspect of the invention that do not require a completely solid construct.

Preferably, the material of which the nipple portion **12** is fabricated has a Durometer A (or Shore A) hardness that is substantially within the range of about 1 to about 20. More preferably, the first material has a Durometer A hardness that is within the range of 1 to about 3, or switching to the Shore 00 is scale, most preferably in the range of about 20 to about 45. Below the latter range is nonetheless also considered efficacious. It will be understood that the use of the phraseology "less than x" or "less than about x" includes x.

The nipple **10** includes a second subpart or mounting portion **14** formed at a distal end thereof, which is designed to be attachable to a container in a fluid-tight manner. Alternatively, a secondary collar or like attachment piece could be used to attach the nipple **10** to the container. The material of which mounting portion **14** is fabricated preferably has a Durometer A hardness that may be formed of the same or a greater Durometer hardness than nipple portion **12**. In one embodiment, the mounting portion **14** has a Durometer A hardness that is within the range of about 1 to about 100. More preferably, the material of the mounting portion **14** has a Durometer A hardness that is substantially within the range of about 20 to about 90, or even more preferably in the range of about 70 to about 90.

The nipple portion **12** illustrated in FIGS. **1** and **2** include a plurality of ducts **16**. Any number of ducts **16** may be used, including just one. The ducts **16** are longitudinal (axial) passageways formed in the material of the nipple **12**. Each duct includes an inner opening **18** in communication with an inner chamber **20** of the nipple **10**. Each duct includes an outer opening **22** that is open to the exterior of the nipple. Fluid may flow from chamber **20**, into inner s openings **18**, through ducts **16** and out through outer openings **22**. In an alternate embodiment, the outer openings **22** may include valve devices **23** (FIG. **1**A), the function of which is at least in part to control, reduce or prevent passage of fluid therethrough in certain circumstances.

A flange-like skirt or transitional member **24** extends generally radially **10** from the nipple portion **12** to an upper annular surface **26** of the mounting portion **14**. The main body **28** of the mounting portion **14** may be formed of a gently concave cylinder **30**, although this concavity is not required. A lower part **32** of the mounting portion **14** includes an inner lip **34** and a lower lip **36** with an inner groove **38** defined therebetween. The lower part **32** may be elastically deformed so as to be received on a container (not shown) and wherein the inner groove **38** is fitted over a corresponding mating feature on the container as in a snap-fit, screw attachment, and so on.

The nipple **10** may be formed as a single unitary part, or joined together from two or more parts. In this illustrated first embodiment, the nipple **10** is formed of two parts by a scarf-type joint **40**. Adhesive bonding, heat bonding, chemical bonding, contact molding, ultrasonic welding or any suitable method may hold the joint **40** together. It will be understood that any suitable method of forming the nipple **10** may be employed, such as molding, casting, or two-shot molding, for example.

FIG. **2** illustrates one embodiment of an arrangement of the ducts **16**. The ducts **16** number six individual ducts, although any suitable number of ducts is contemplated. The ducts are arranged in a triangular pattern, each vertice of the triangle similarly spaced from a middle or central axis of the nipple. Two ducts **16** comprise a set and are positioned so as to be arranged axially outwardly in a line from the central axis. Other arrangements of ducts are contemplated that effectively convey fluids through the nipple **10**; this is just one such. As discussed above, the ducts **16** may terminate with a round hole, slit, chisel, "S"-shaped aperture or "Y"-shaped aperture (not shown), for example, or any suitable terminal aperture shape. The termination of the ducts, whether a slit or other shape, may function as a valve.

FIG. **3** shows another embodiment of the present invention. In the illustrated embodiment, the nipple **110** is formed of a two-part construction. The nipple portion **112** includes a substantially solid nipple end **113**, which extends to a hollow, dome-shaped body **115**. The nipple portion **112** is similar to that described above, i.e., a substantially solid nipple body including a plurality of ducts **116** extending therethrough. The body **115** flares outward from the base of the nipple **112** and connects to a collar **142** for connecting to a bottle (not shown).

FIG. **4** shows one embodiment of a collar **142** according to the present invention. The collar **142** here is formed of a rigid plastic material. The collar **142** includes an annular sidewall **144**. A mounting ring **146** is positioned at a top end **148** of the collar **142**. The mounting ring **146** is formed radially inwardly form the sidewall **144** and includes a foraminous configuration **150**. The configuration **150** is formed of a latticework defining openings **152** therebetween. The configuration **150** may be formed of a plurality of closely spaced openings **152** or any suitable method of providing passageways through the material of the collar. The openings **152** of the configuration **148** are provided so as to permit material of the body **115** to penetrate through the mounting ring **146** and

become securely affixed thereto in manufacture. An inner surface **154** of the collar **142** may include a device for fastening the collar **142** to a bottle, such as, for example, a set of threads **156** (see FIGS. **5**, **6**, **7** and **8**).

Referring to FIG. **7**, this view of the embodiment of the artificial nipple **110** of the present invention details the attachment of the nipple body **115** and collar **142**. In particular, a lower end **158** of the nipple body **115** is positioned by molding, casting or the like so as to be intermingled or extended through the openings **152** of the mounting ring **146**. As a result, a lowermost surface **160** (and see FIG. **8**) is created on the lower end **158**, which is oriented downwardly and positioned so as to sealingly engage a corresponding surface of a nursing bottle, container or the like.

A vent **162** is shown in FIG. **7**, for instance. As noted, the lower end **158** of the body **115** is joined to the collar **142**. A horizontal passageway **164** is formed through the sidewall material of the nipple body **115**. The passageway **164** is open to atmosphere at an outside end, and communicates at an inside end with a vertical passageway or air inlet **166** (FIG. **8**). The vertical passageway **166** is in communication with inner chamber **120** of the nipple body **115**.

FIG. **8** shows the nipple described in FIG. **3** from a bottom perspective view. The vertical passageway **166** is open to the inner chamber **120**. Also, the sealing surface **160** is shown generally at a position whereby the nipple portion **112** joins the collar **142**.

FIG. **9** shows an embodiment of the artificial nipple **210** of the present invention wherein the nipple portion **212** is offset with respect to a centerline "C" drawn along the center axis of the collar **242**. This embodiment positions the nipple lower compared to the fluid level in the bottle. This helps to position the bottle so that milk, instead of air, is at the ducts. It also can improve positioning for feeding. Also, a vent may be positioned on an opposite side from the nipple ducts so as to be higher when in use and thus, properly venting.

FIG. **10** shows still another embodiment of an artificial nipple according to the present invention. The nipple, illustrated generally at **310**, is intended for use with a container, such as a bottle or bag. As in the above-described examples, the nipple **310** may be made of any suitable material, but in a preferred form is made of a silicone material, such as silicone rubber.

The nipple **310** may be formed of two subparts including a substantially solid nipple portion **312** at an upper or proximal end thereof for insertion into an infant's mouth and for conveying fluids therethrough from an attached container (not shown) and a lower or distal end including a mounting portion **314** for attachment to the container.

The nipple portion **312** is a generally cylindrical and substantially solid body. Again, the material of which the nipple portion **312** is fabricated is of a Durometer A (or Shore A) hardness that is substantially within the previously described preferred range. Of course, other shapes besides cylindrical can be used, such as orthodontic-type nipples, and so forth.

The nipple portion **312** includes a plurality of ducts **316** (see FIG. **12**). The ducts **316** are longitudinal (axial) passageways formed in the material of the nipple **312**. Each duct includes an inner opening **318** in communication with an inner chamber **320** of the nipple **310**. Each duct **316** includes an outer opening **322** that is open to the exterior of the nipple. The ducts **316** may be arranged as shown in FIG. **2** or, in the alternate as shown in FIG. **12**, or any suitable effective arrangement which takes into account the nipple **312** material and other factors such as the length of the ducts through the nipple, and the amount of flow through desired.

During use, fluid may flow from chamber **320**, into inner openings **318**, through ducts **316** and out through outer openings **322**. In an alternate embodiment, the outer openings **322** may include valve devices (not shown in this version, but see, for instance, FIGS. **16A-16C** and related discussion thereof).

As shown in FIGS. **10** and **11**, the second subpart or mounting portion **314** extends from and is attached to the nipple portion **312**. The mounting portion **314** is attachable to a container in a secure, fluid-tight matter. The material of mounting portion **314** is fabricated of a material that may be of about the same or a greater Durometer hardness than nipple portion **312**. Here, the mounting portion **314** has a Durometer A hardness that is within the range of about 1 to about 100. More preferably, the material of the mounting portion **314** has a Durometer A hardness that is substantially within the range of about 20 to about 90. It will be understood that the mounting portion should have a Durometer A hardness sufficient to enable secure and leak-free attachment to a container. Sandblasting the mold for the mounting portion **314** to provide a matte-type finish for the molded piece in the threaded area is useful for reducing friction when screwing the nipple on a container.

The nipple portion **312** extends into a dome-like structure to form skirt **370** at a lower portion thereof. An inner face **372** of the skirt portion **370** overlaps and connects to an outer face **374** of a corresponding upper engaging section **376** of the mounting portion **314**. Adjacent and below the upper engaging section **376** of the mounting portion **314**, and shown in more detail in FIG. **11**, is an inner lip **378** positioned radially inboard from a generally horizontal land **380**, which, with inner wall **382**, define a generally open channel **384** for sealingly engaging with a container such as a top of a bottle (not shown). The inner wall **382** may be provided with a thread feature **386** to engage a corresponding feature on the container. The thread feature **386** may be a single raised thread as shown, or any suitable numbers of threads for engagement with the container. Furthermore, the horizontal land **380** and inner lip may include a channel **381***a* and **381***b* formed therein which functions as a vent.

Channel **381***a* and **381***b* is also shown in FIG. **11**A. It has a radial part **381***a* that extends across the land **380** from the inner sidewall **382** to the inner lip **378**. While inner lip **378** is relatively thin in its radial dimension, channel part **381***b* is nonetheless formed therein on its outboard facing side and mates with the inside wall of the bottle. This vent structure **281***b* does not appreciably change whether the nipple is screwed on with a small or a larger force. Radial channel part **381***a* is deep enough that it can be compressed without affecting venting.

The dome-like structure of skirt portion **370** has a lower rim section **394**. In one embodiment, the low Durometer material of the nipple portion **312** extends to the lower rim **394**. Alternatively, the lowest Durometer material stops at the bottom of the skirt **370**. The flexibility of the nipple **310** and its general exterior softness can thus be suitably modified in this simple manner.

A retaining ring **388**, preferably made of a rigid plastic, may be positioned abut the outer peripheral surface **390** of the mounting portion **314**. The retaining ring **388** reinforces the mounting portion **314** over the thread feature **386**, thereby assisting the mating of the thread feature **386** with the container, and prevents the mounting portion **314** from flexing outwardly when being attached thereto. The retaining ring **388** is held in place at least in part by a bead **392** formed at the rim section **394** of mounting portion **314**. The ring **388** can advantageously be color coded to indicate a feature of the nipple **312**, such as where a plurality of nipples are available

in different shapes, flow rates, softness and so forth. Other differentiating indicia may be used besides color-coding, of course.

In this illustrated embodiment, the nipple **310** is formed from nipple portion **312** and mounting portion **314** by co-molding, adhesive bonding, heat bonding, chemical bonding, casting or any suitable method to unite the two. Again, the mold in which the present invention is molded may be sand-blasted in order to produce a heavy matte finish on the nipple. In this manner, friction is reduced when screwing the nipple onto a container. This is particularly advantageous in a mounting portion made of silicone rubber or similar elastomer.

Turning to FIG. **13**, another embodiment of the present invention is shown to illustrate a set of dimensions of a preferred nipple. It will be understood that the dimensions, lengths, widths, radii, and so on as provided herein are changeable according to a number of variables related to the material used to form the nipple, the intended end user, manufacturing, flow and other factors. The provided dimensions are intended to illustrate a preferred embodiment and are not intended to be limiting. Structurally and dimensionally, the nipple **410** shown in FIG. **13** is similar to that shown in FIG. **10**, and therefore these dimensions may be beneficially applied to the nipple shown and described in FIG. **10**, for example, as well as other embodiments.

As above, the nipple **410** includes a nipple portion **412** and a mounting portion **414**. Preferably, the nipple portion **412** is made of a platinum cured or similar silicone rubber having a Shore A hardness in the ranges previously indicated. The nipple portion **412** of the nipple **410** has an insertable axial length of about 23 mm, a greater diameter of 13.5 mm and a lesser diameter of 11.8 mm. At times the suckling infant may also insert more of the nipple than just the first 23 mm of nipple portion **412** and may also insert some or even all of the skirt **470**. The overall length of the nipple portion is 40.3 mm. It will be noted that the flexibility, and extensibility of this transition area between the elongated nipple portion and the mounting base, is very like that of the areola of the mother. Like the elongated nipple itself, the skirt **470** area stretches and elongated in the month.

The duct **422**, formed in the nipple portion **412** is formed by a 21.8 mm pin in a molding process using platinum cured silicone rubber as the molded nipple material. The duct **422** is 1.1 mm in diameter. There may be more than one duct **422**.

The mounting portion **414** is made of a silicone rubber having a Shore A hardness of 80. The depicted embodiment differs from that shown in FIG. **10**, in that, an annular peripheral channel **498** is formed about the mounting portion for a retaining ring (not shown, e.g., ring **388**). The width of the mounting portion reaches 45.6 mm. Other features of this nipple are the same as those described, and set out in FIG. **10**.

Turning to FIG. **14**, the nipple portion **512** includes a duct **522** with a modified terminal aperture **591**. The cylindrical duct is 1.1 mm in diameter. The terminal aperture **591** is round in cross section and 0.15 mm in diameter.

The nipple portion **612** depicted in FIG. **15** has another embodiment of a modified terminal aperture or terminus **691**, which is chisel shaped to provide a slit-shaped opening. In this manner, the terminal aperture **691** may beneficially function to prohibit unintended flow through the nipple and other beneficial flow characteristics.

FIG. **16**A shows another variation on a nipple end structure wherein the duct **16** (or indeed any of the other ducts described herein) has a generally cylindrical internal cavity terminating in a small diameter outlet **692**. FIG. **17**B shows an end-view of such a structure.

FIG. **16**B shows a chisel-shaped terminus for the duct **16**, with opposed sidewalls **692***a* and **692***b* which end in a slit **693**, the latter shown in end-view in FIG. **17**A.

FIG. **16**C is yet another terminus structure for the nipple duct **16**, this also having a chisel-shape **692***a* and **692***b* ending in a slit **693**. Outboard sidewalls **694***a* and **694***b* defined within a well **695** give this structure a duck-bill configuration.

All of these terminal structures in FIGS. **16**A-**16**C, and indeed the inboard end structure of FIG. **1**A, serve as valves for allowing fluid flow out through the nipple, but generally (or substantially completely in certain structures) preventing flow back into the nipple.

FIGS. **18**A and **18**B show nipple **410** with indicia **701** indicating different features of the nipples. FIGS. **18**C and **18**D each show nipple **410** with different color coding indicating different features of the nipples. For example, nipple **410** of FIG. **18**C may be pink colored at **702** and nipple **410** of FIG. **18**D may be blue colored at **702**.

Thus, while the invention has been described with respect to certain preferred embodiments, it will be understood by those of skill in the art that there are modifications, substitutions and other changes that can be made, yet will still fall within the intended scope of the invention, as set forth in the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A nipple, comprising:

a substantially solid nipple portion adapted to be inserted into the mouth of a user and being formed of a material having a Shore A hardness of less than about 5;

at least one duct for conveying fluid through said nipple; said nipple in use being capable of contraction along its radius so as to restrict passage of fluids through said at least one duct.

2. The nipple of claim **1**, wherein said solid nipple portion has a Shore 00 hardness in the range of about 20 to about 45.

3. A nipple for baby feeding, comprising:

a substantially solid nipple having a Shore A hardness of less than about 5 yielding a very soft solid nipple, including one or more ducts formed therethrough for conveying fluids through said nipple and having a flow restrictive feature presented by said very soft solid nipple which in use is capable of contraction along its radius, positioned in said one or more ducts, said flow restrictive feature preventing passage of fluids through said one or more ducts.

4. The nipple of claim **3**, wherein said solid nipple portion has a Shore 00 hardness in the range of about 20 to about 45.

5. An improved feeding nipple, comprising:

a substantially solid nipple portion adapted for mouth-insertion and formed of a material having a first Shore A hardness of less than about 5, with at least one fluid conveying duct formed therethrough wherein said at least one fluid conveying duct is collapsible during use to substantially prevent the passage of fluid therethrough; and

a container attachment portion formed of a material having a second Shore A hardness, said second Shore A hardness being greater than said first Shore A hardness; said container portion and said solid nipple portion being formed in a unitary piece.

6. The nipple of claim **5**, wherein said solid nipple portion has a Shore 00 hardness in the range of about 20 to about 45.

7. An improved feeding nipple, comprising:

a substantially solid nipple including one or more ducts formed therethrough for conveying fluids through said nipple, said nipple being radially compressible so as to prevent passage of fluids through said one or more ducts

when so compressed, and wherein said solid nipple portion has a Shore A hardness of less than about 5.

8. A feeding nipple for use with a container, comprising:

a substantially solid nipple portion including one or more ducts for conveying fluids through said nipple portion wherein said one or more ducts are collapsible during use to substantially prevent the passage of fluid therethrough; and

a mounting portion, said mounting portion including a land for providing a seal with a container and an attachment feature for securing said feeding nipple to the container, and wherein said solid nipple portion has a Shore A hardness of less than about 5.

9. An improved feeding nipple wherein the improvement comprises:

an elongated nipple part having a Shore A hardness less than about 5 adapted to be insertable into a user's mouth, said elongated nipple part having at least one conduit formed therethrough for conveying fluid from a distal end to a proximal end where fluid exits the nipple into the user's mouth, said elongated nipple part being made of a soft material capable of substantially closing said conduit(s) in use under at least one of

(a) an extension force stretching said elongated part longitudinal to thereby constrict said conduit(s) or

(b) a radially inwardly compressive force to thereby pinch said conduit(s).

10. The improved nipple of claim **9**, wherein said elongated nipple part has at least three conduits.

11. The improved nipple of claim **9**, wherein said improved nipple further includes a mounting portion having an attachment device associated therewith capable of affixing the nipple to a container, and a transition portion between said mounting portion and said elongated nipple part, said transition portion forming a hollow dome with said mounting portion, said distal end of said elongated nipple part communicating with said dome.

12. The improved nipple of claim **11**, wherein said elongated nipple part, transition portion and mounting portion are formed as one integral piece.

13. The improved nipple of claim **12**, wherein said mounting portion is formed of a material that is more rigid than said soft material.

14. The improved nipple of claim **13**, wherein said mounting portion has a Shore A hardness in the range of about 20 to about 90, and said elongated nipple part has a Shore A hardness less than about 5.

15. The improved nipple of claim **12**, wherein said mounting portion has a sufficient rigidity to maintain its shape in use under an extension force applied to said elongated nipple part by the user's mouth.

16. The improved nipple of claim **13**, wherein said mounting portion and said elongated part are co-molded together.

17. The improved nipple of claim **11**, further including a rigidifying attachment ring, said ring surrounding a collar segment of said mounting portion to thereby substantially restrict radially outward movement of said mounting portion in the area of said collar segment.

18. The improved nipple of claim **17**, wherein said ring is located around the exterior of said collar segment.

19. The improved nipple of claim **18**, wherein the improvement further comprises a plurality of nipples having at least one differing feature, and a plurality of rings having indicia indicative of a particular different feature.

20. The improved nipple of claim **19**, wherein said indicia comprises color-coding.

21. An improved feeding nipple, comprising:

a substantially solid nipple including one or more ducts formed therethrough for conveying fluids through said nipple, said nipple being radially compressible so as to prevent passage of fluids through said one or more ducts when so compressed, and wherein said solid nipple portion has a Shore 00 hardness in the range of about 20 to about 45.

22. A feeding nipple for use with a container, comprising:

a substantially solid nipple portion including one or more ducts for conveying fluids through said nipple portion wherein said one or more ducts are collapsible during use to substantially prevent the passage of fluid therethrough; and

a mounting portion, said mounting portion including a land for providing a seal with a container and an attachment feature for securing said feeding nipple to the container, and wherein said solid nipple portion has a Shore 00 hardness in the range of about 20 to about 45.

23. A nursing nipple, comprising:

a substantially solid elongated nipple portion formed of a material having a Shore 00 hardness of less than about 45 and sized and shaped to be insertable into the mouth of a nursing infant, said elongated portion having a proximal end, with at least one duct extending through said solid nipple portion;

a transition portion defining an internal volume, wherein said one or more ducts are collapsible during use to substantially prevent the passage of fluid therethrough; and

a container attachment portion, said container attachment portion being a generally cylindrical ring and having an internal shoulder adapted to engage a rim of a container mouth, said shoulder having a channel formed therein which communicates with said volume at one end and which communicates with ambient air at another end to thereby form a vent.

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