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(54) **PTFE LAYERS AND METHODS OF MANUFACTURING**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

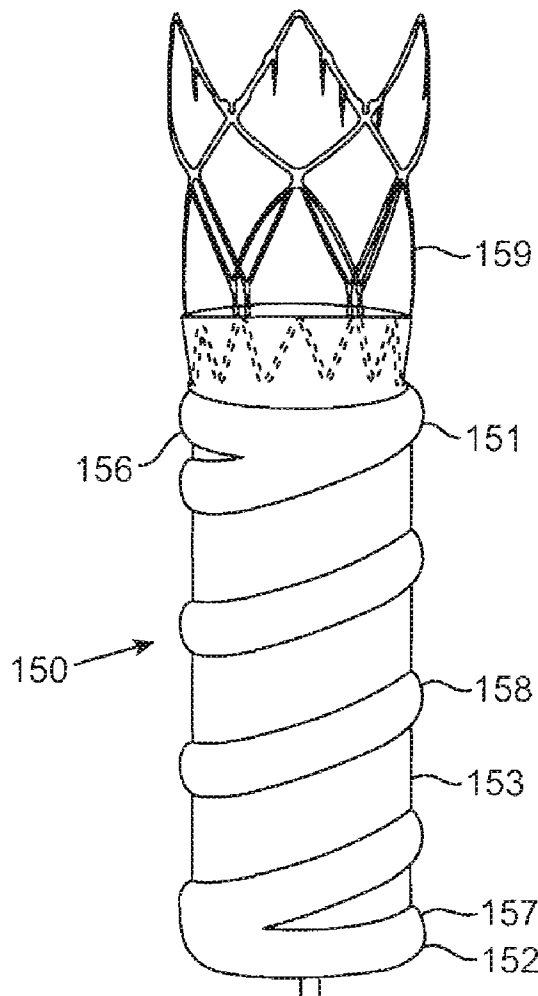
(21) Appl. No.: **12/250,915**

Single, continuous PTFE layers having lateral zones of varied characteristics are described. Some of the lateral zone embodiments may include PTFE material having little or no nodal and fibril microstructure. Methods of manufacturing PTFE layers allow for controllable permeability and porosity of the layers, in addition to other characteristics. The characteristics may vary from one lateral zone of a PTFE layer to a second lateral zone of a PTFE layer. In some embodiments, the PTFE layers may act as a barrier layer in an endovascular graft or other medical device.

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Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 11/106,131, filed on Apr. 13, 2005.



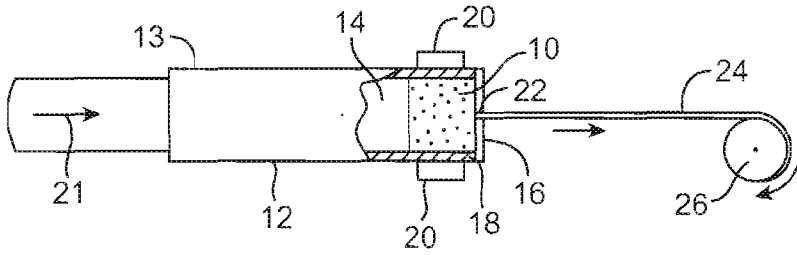


FIG. 1

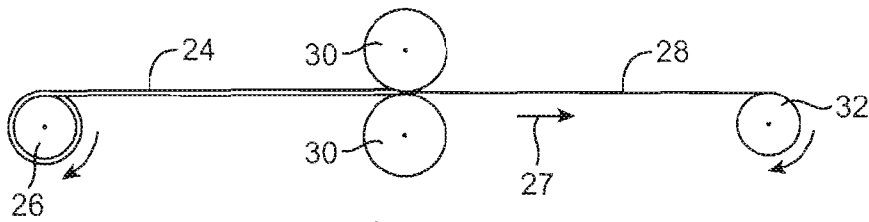


FIG. 2

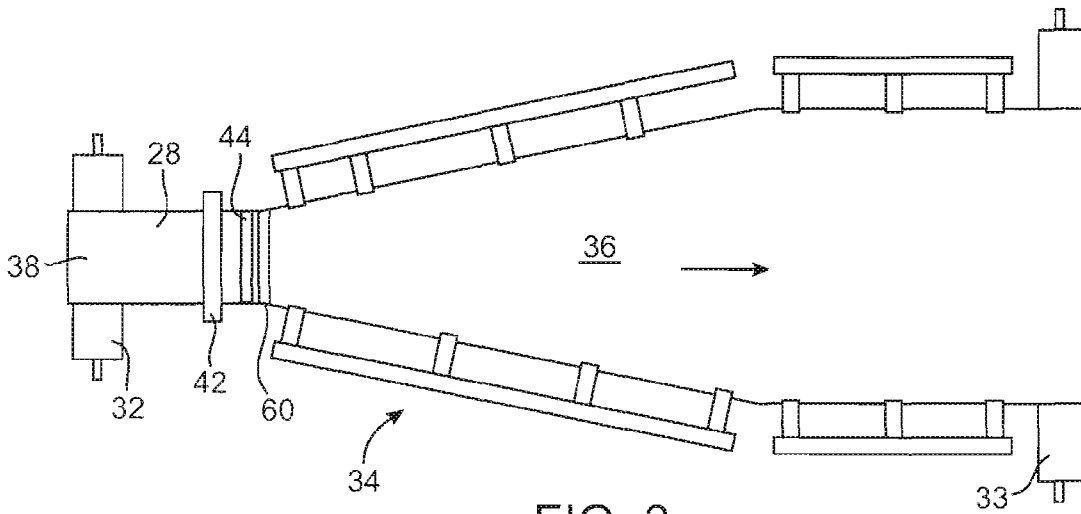


FIG. 3

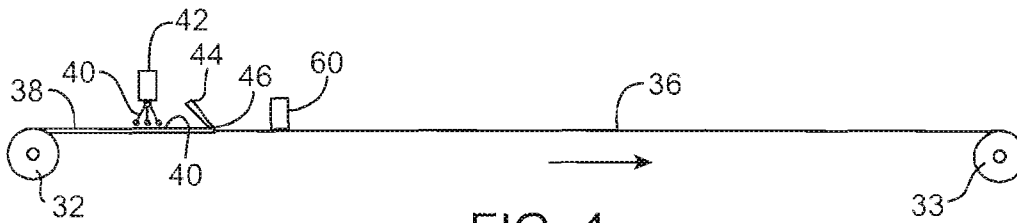


FIG. 4

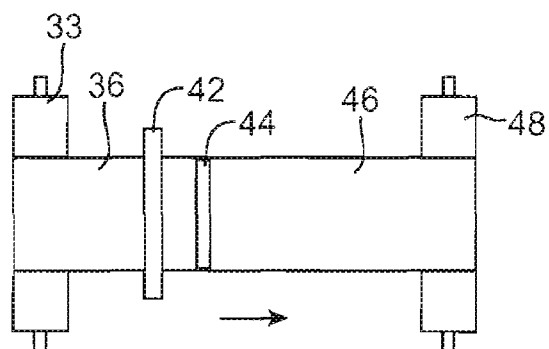


FIG. 5

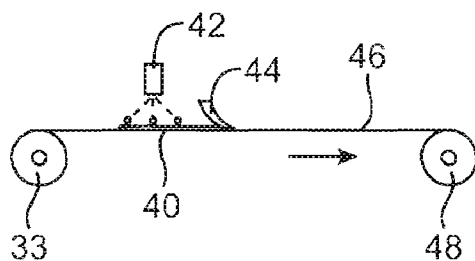


FIG. 6

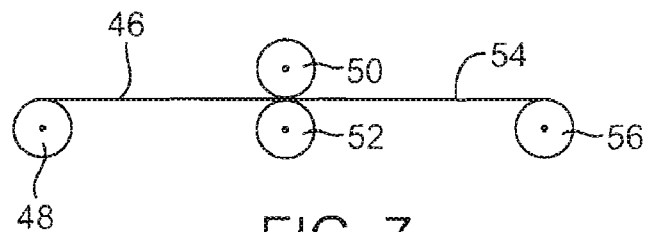


FIG. 7

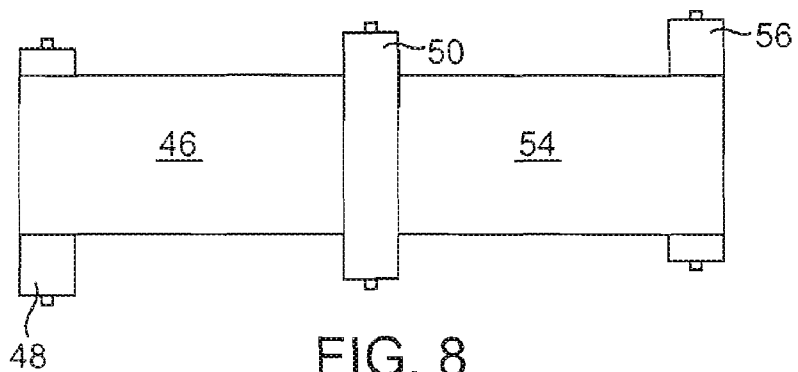


FIG. 8

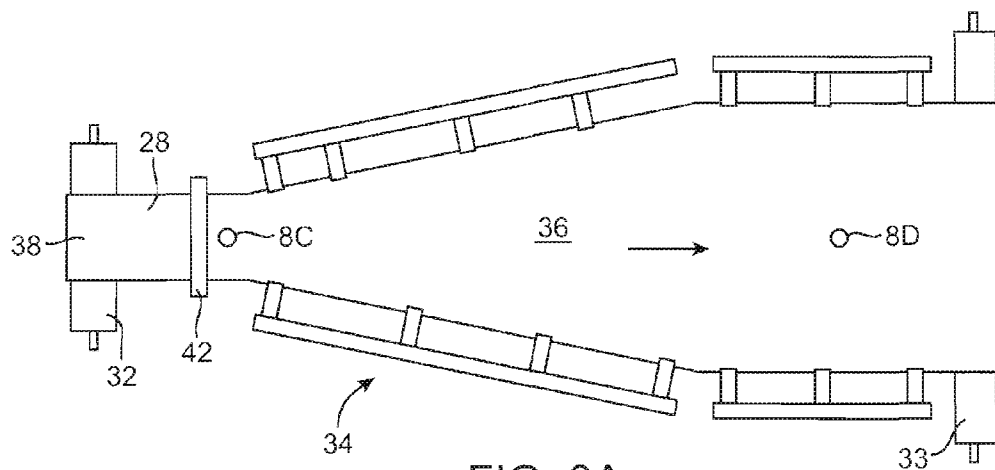


FIG. 8A

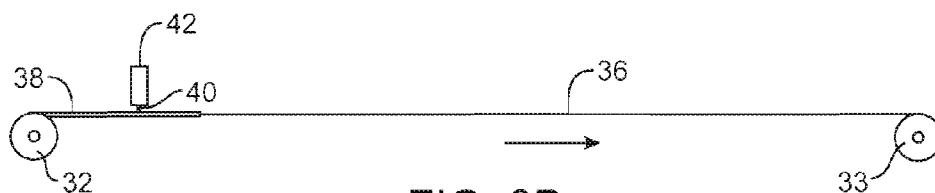


FIG. 8B

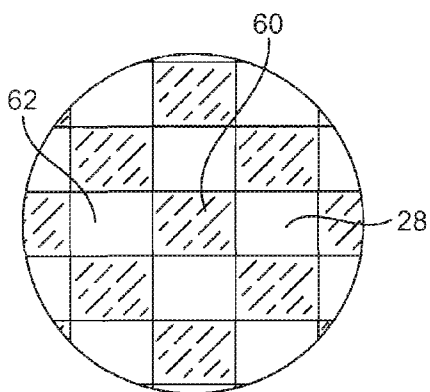


FIG. 8C

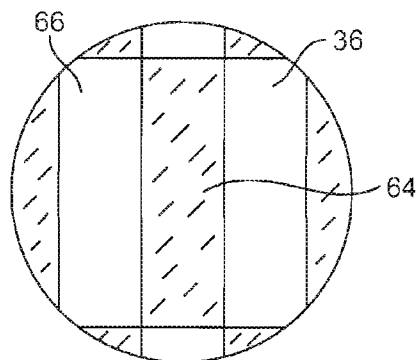


FIG. 8D

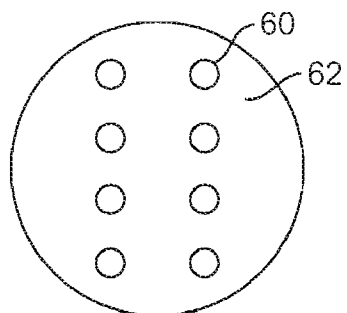


FIG. 8E

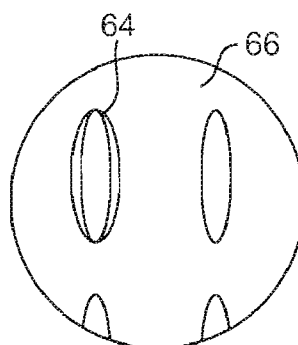


FIG. 8F

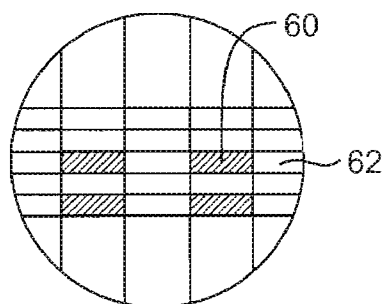


FIG. 8G

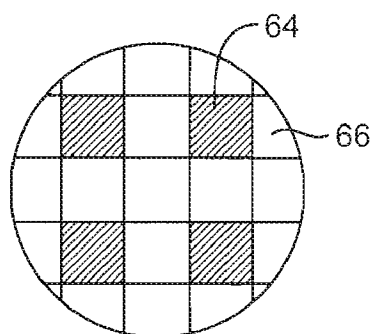


FIG. 8H

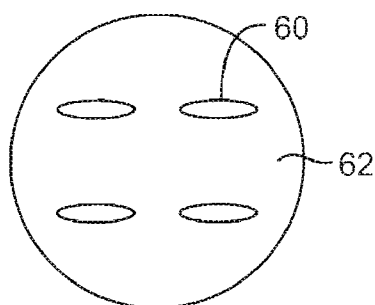


FIG. 8I

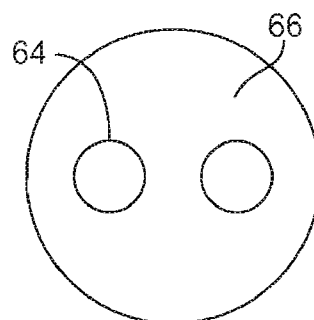


FIG. 8J

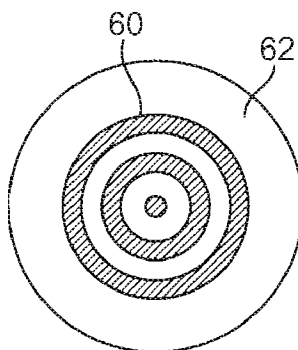


FIG. 8K

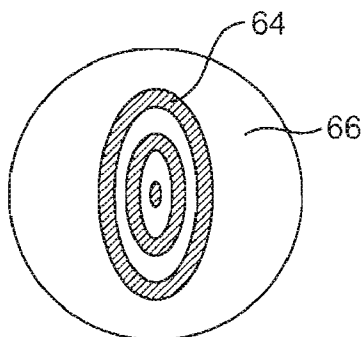


FIG. 8L

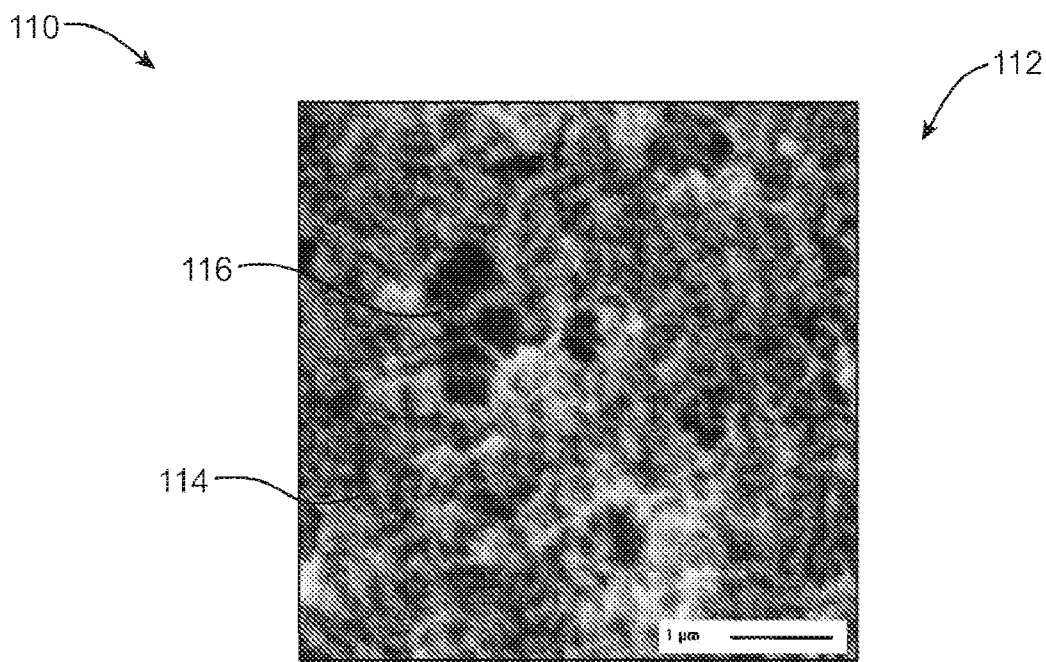


FIG. 9 (20,000x)

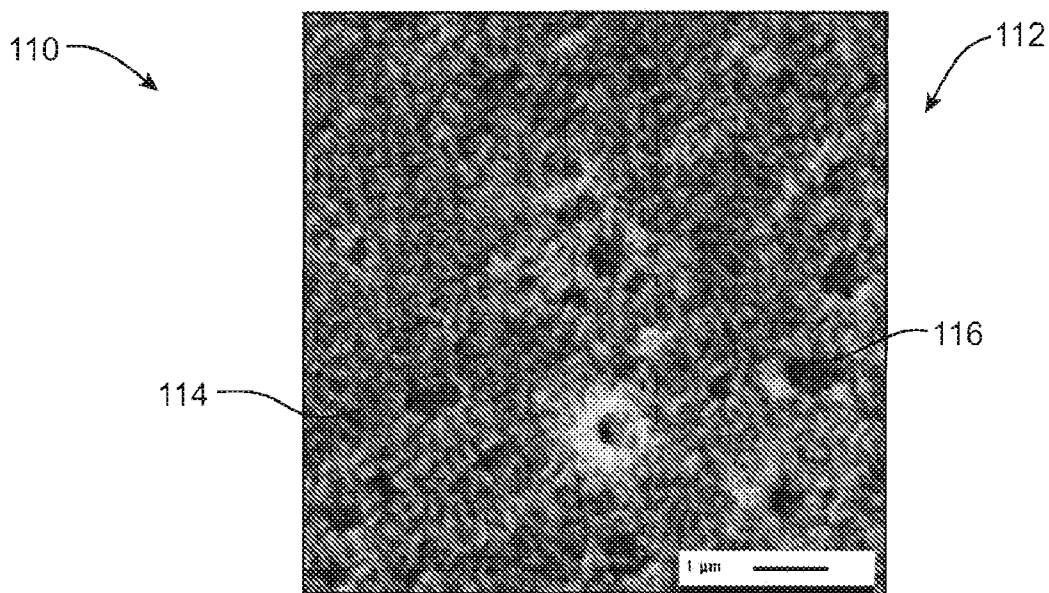


FIG. 10 (14,000x)

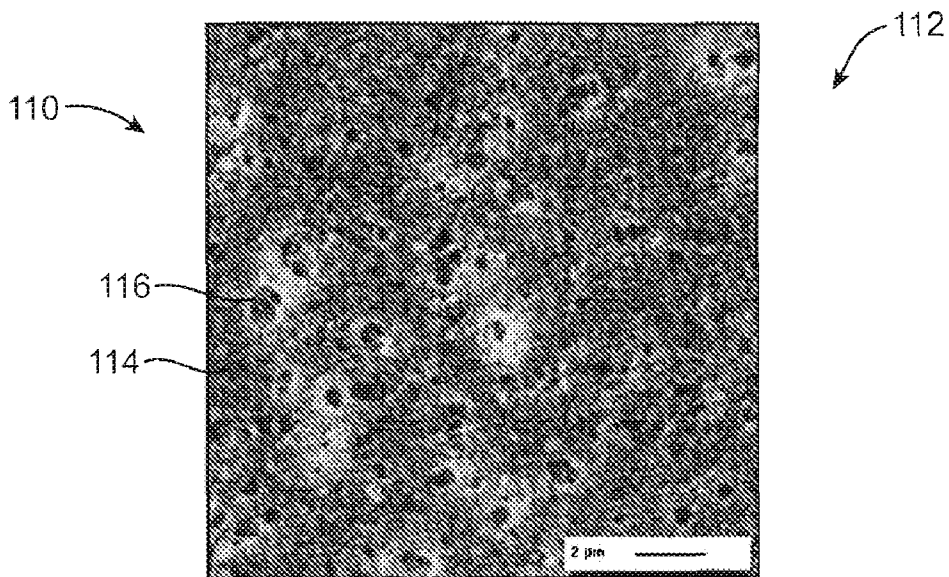


FIG. 11 (7,000x)

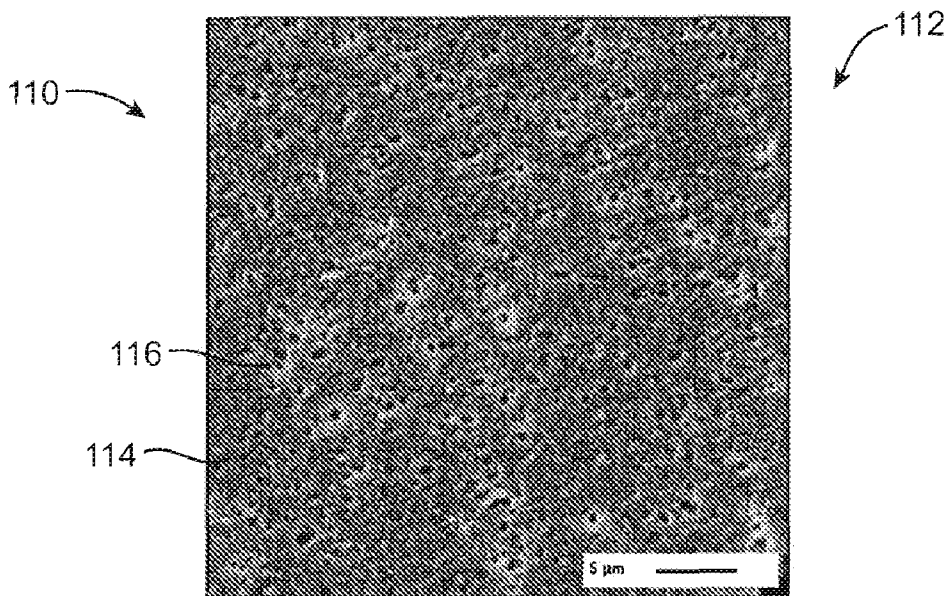


FIG. 12 (3,000x)

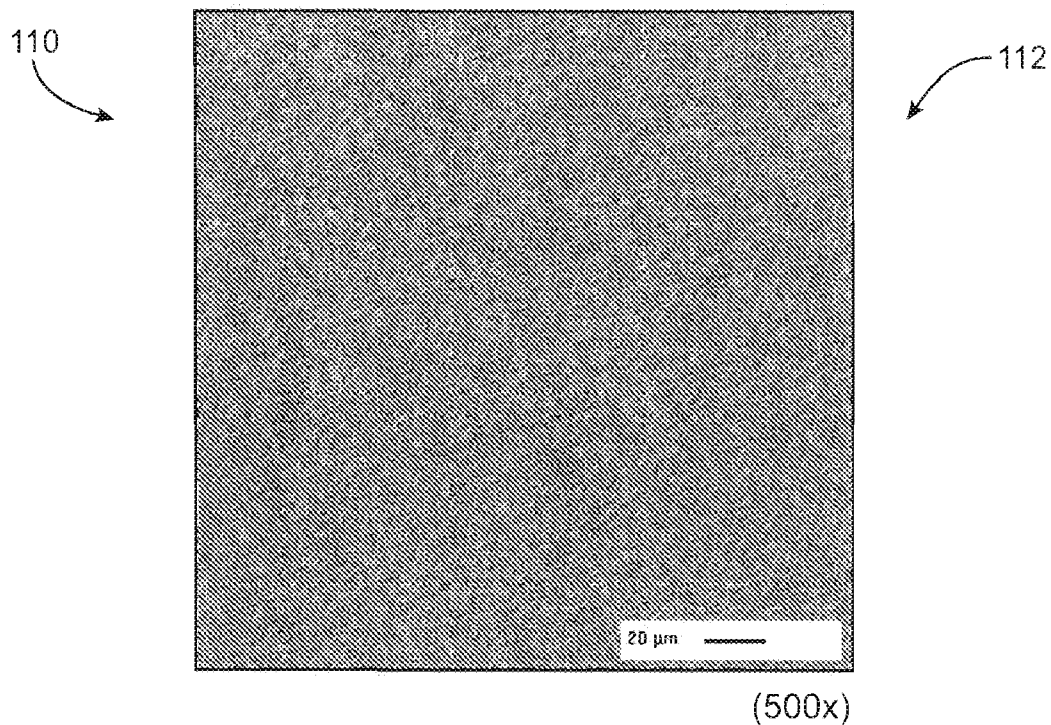


FIG. 13

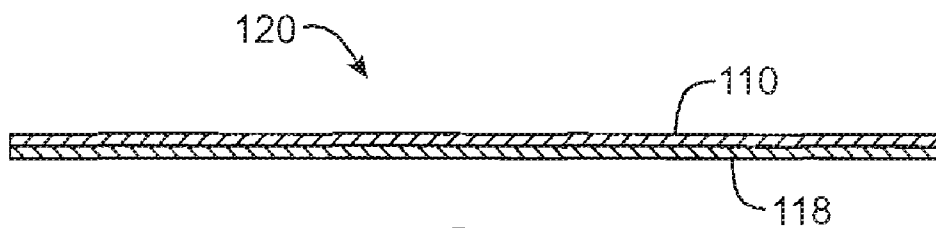


FIG. 14

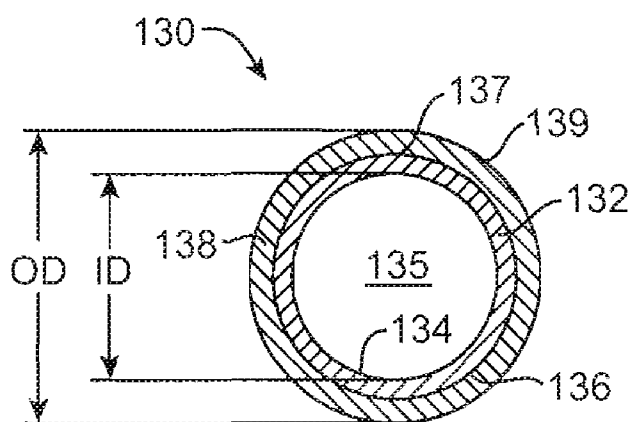


FIG. 15

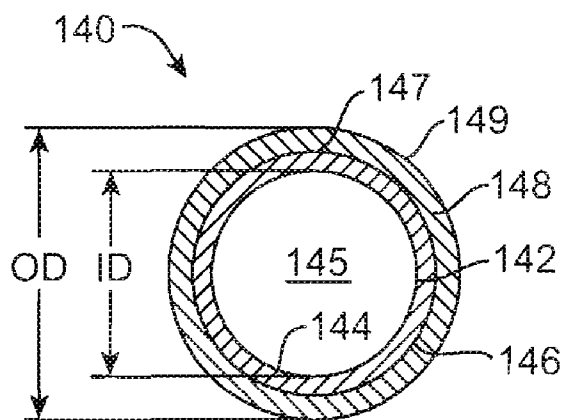


FIG. 16

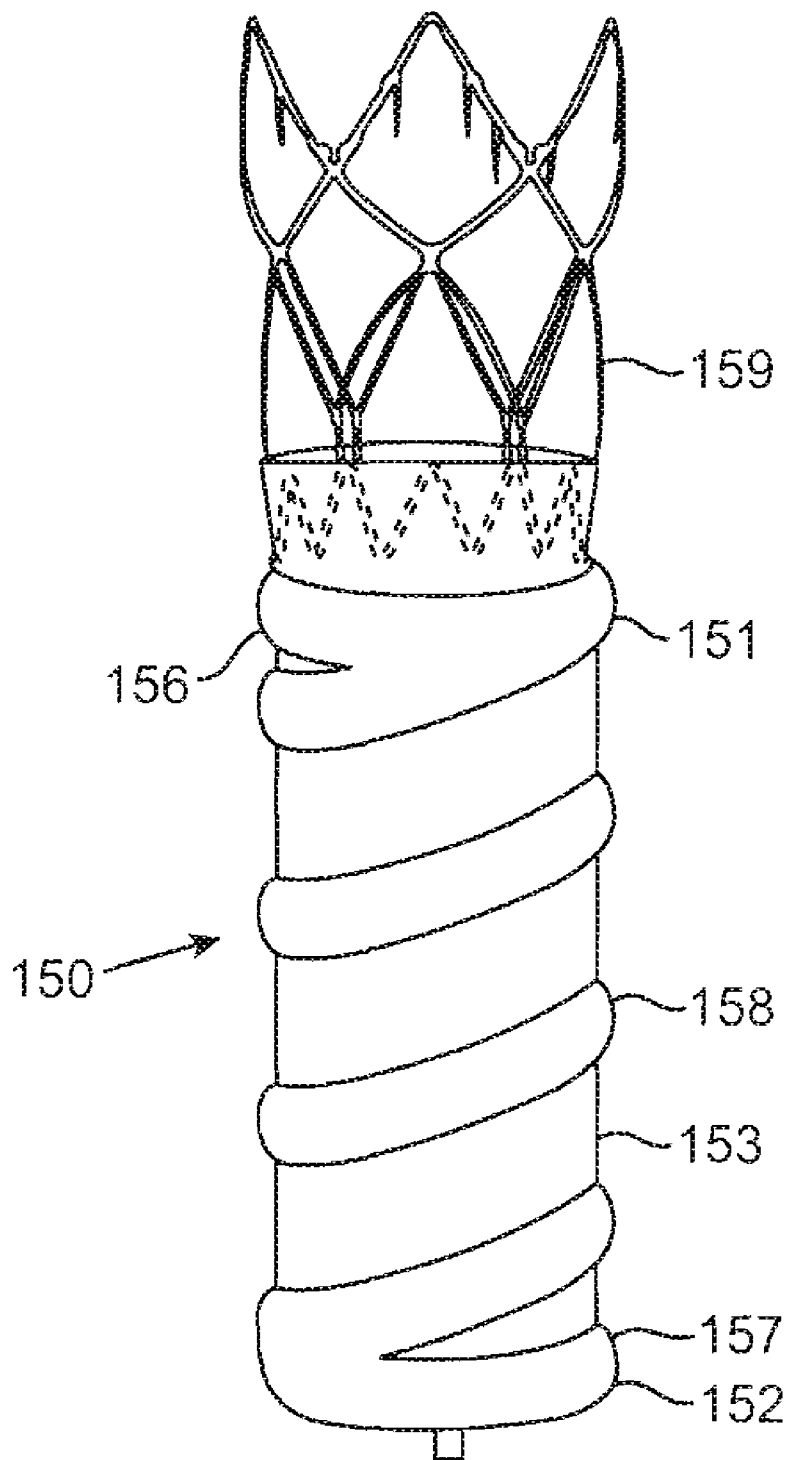


FIG. 17

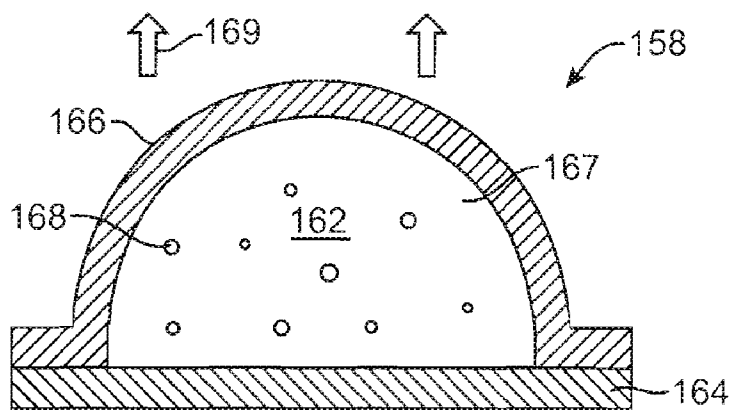


FIG. 18

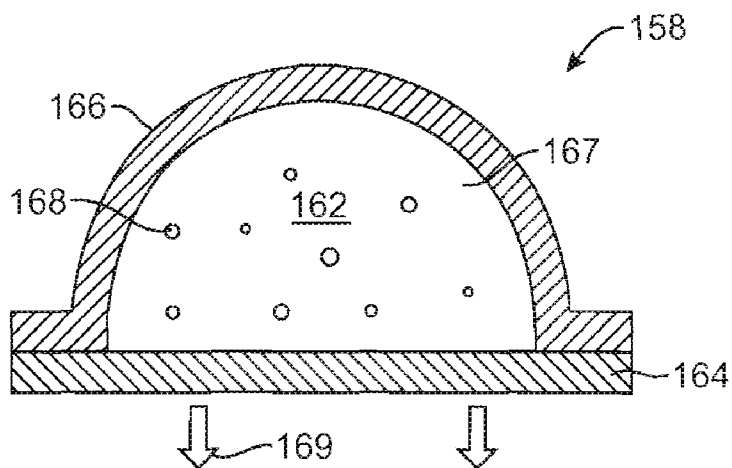


FIG. 19

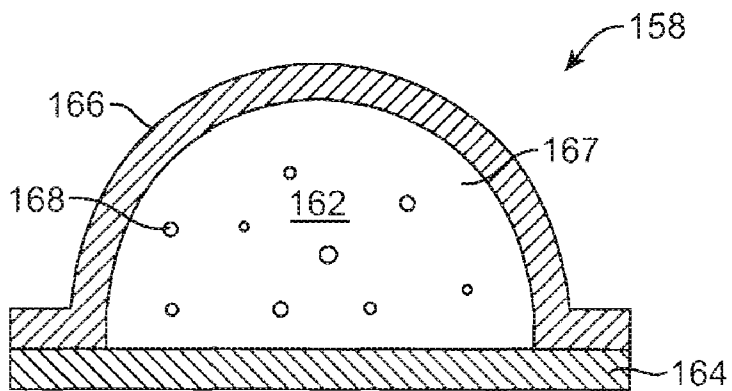


FIG. 20

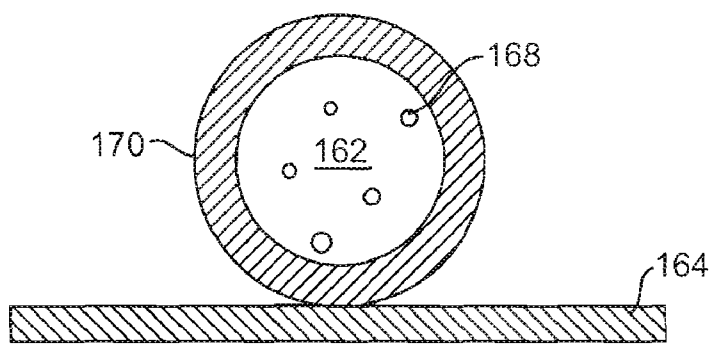


FIG. 21

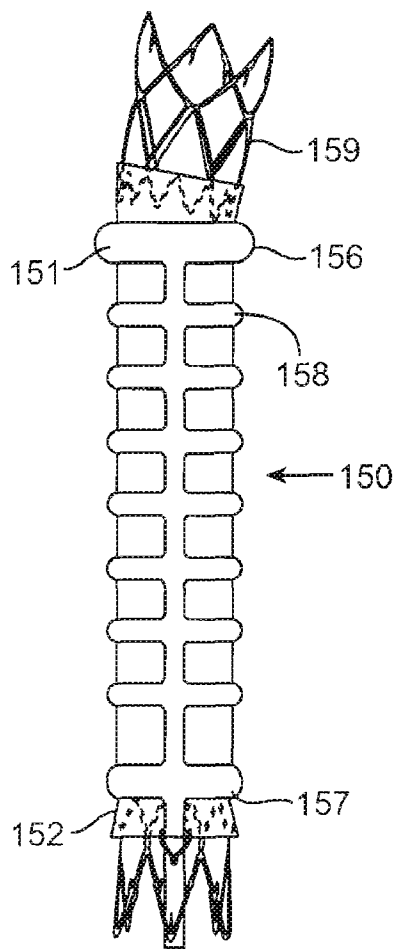


FIG. 22

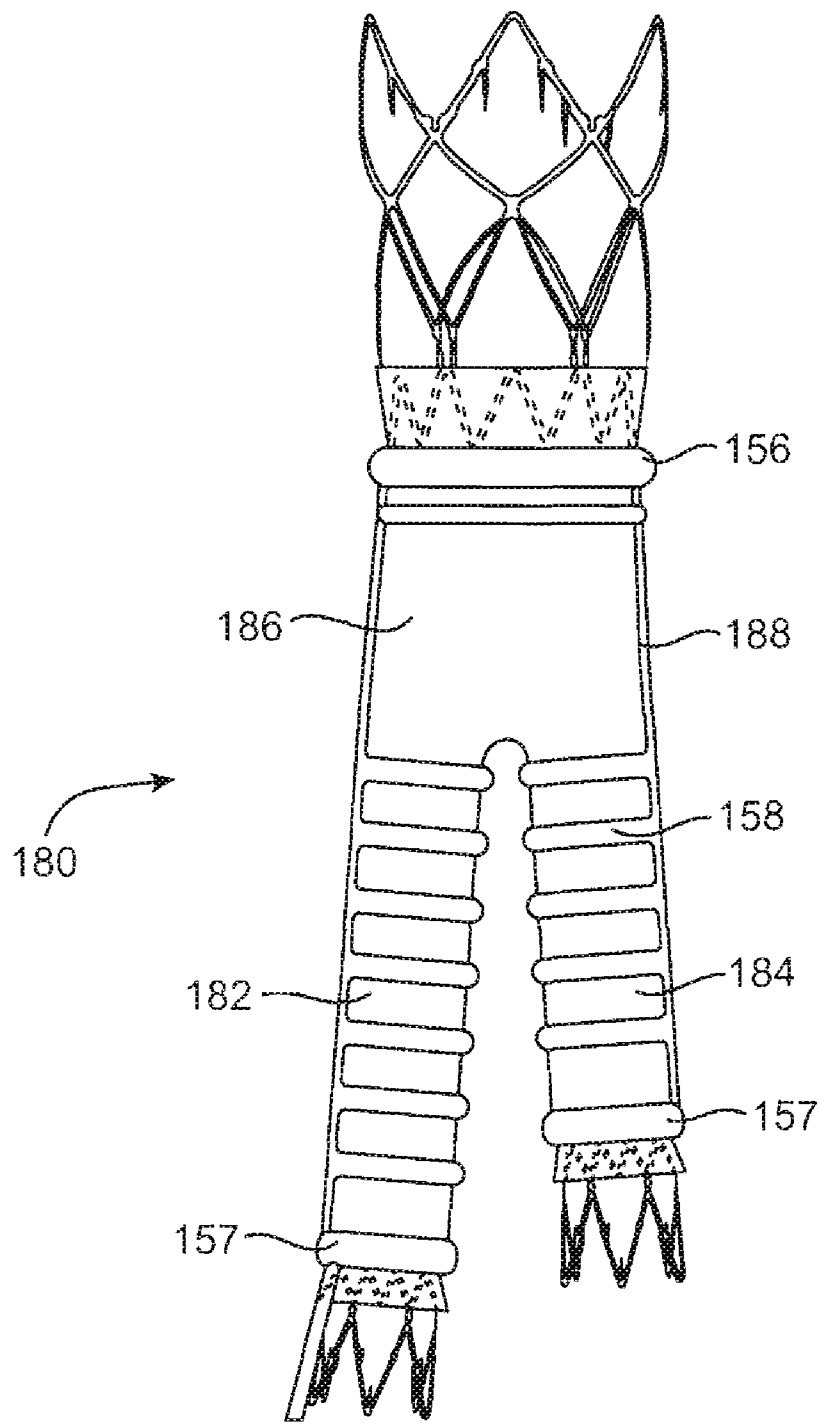


FIG. 23

PTFE LAYERS AND METHODS OF MANUFACTURING

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation of application Ser. No. 11/106,131, filed Apr. 13, 2005, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) layers have been used for the manufacture of various types of intracorporeal devices, such as vascular grafts. Such vascular grafts may be used to replace, reinforce, or bypass a diseased or injured body lumen. One conventional method of manufacturing "expanded" PTFE layers is described in U.S. Pat. No. 3,953,566 by Gore. In the methods described therein, a PTFE paste is formed by combining a PTFE resin and a lubricant. The PTFE paste may be extruded. After the lubricant is removed from the extruded paste, the PTFE article is stretched to create a porous, high strength PTFE article. The expanded PTFE layer is characterized by a porous, open microstructure that has nodes interconnected by fibrils.

[0003] Such an expansion process increases the volume of the PTFE layer by increasing the porosity, decreasing the density and increasing the internodal distance between adjacent nodes in the microstructure while not significantly affecting the thickness of the PTFE layer. As such, the conventional methods expand the PTFE layer and impart a porosity and permeability while only providing a negligible reduction in a thickness of the PTFE layer. In situations where a thin PTFE layer, and specifically, a thin PTFE layer having a low fluid permeability is needed, conventional PTFE layers are largely unsatisfactory due to the porosity and highly permeable nature of the expanded PTFE layer.

[0004] Therefore, what have been needed are improved PTFE layers and improved methods for manufacturing the PTFE layers. In particular, it would be desirable to have thin PTFE layers that have a controllable permeability to fluids (gases, liquids or both). It may also be desirable to have such thin PTFE layers that have a high degree of limpness and suppleness to allow mechanical manipulation or strain of such a PTFE layer without significant recoil or spring back.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] Embodiments of the present invention provide PTFE layers and films and methods of manufacturing the PTFE layers and films. Embodiments of the present invention may include one or more layers of a fluoropolymer, such as PTFE. Embodiments of PTFE layers may include at least a portion that does not have a significant node and fibril microstructure.

[0006] In one embodiment, a method of processing PTFE includes providing a layer of PTFE, selectively applying a stretching agent to at least one lateral zone of the layer of PTFE in a predetermined pattern and stretching the layer of PTFE. In another embodiment, a method of processing PTFE includes providing a layer of PTFE having a stretching agent content level and selectively removing stretching agent from at least one lateral zone of the layer of PTFE in a predetermined pattern and stretching the layer of PTFE. In yet another embodiment of a method of processing PTFE, a layer of PTFE is provided. Stretching agent is applied to at least one

lateral zone of a surface of the layer in a predetermined pattern until the lateral zone is saturated with stretching agent. Next, the layer of PTFE is stretched while the lateral zone of the layer of PTFE is saturated with stretching agent.

[0007] In another embodiment, a PTFE layer includes a layer made by providing a layer of PTFE, selectively applying a stretching agent to at least one lateral zone of the layer of PTFE in a predetermined pattern and stretching the layer of PTFE. In another embodiment, a PTFE layer includes a layer made by providing a layer of PTFE having a stretching agent content level, selectively removing stretching agent from at least one lateral zone of the portion of the layer of PTFE in a predetermined pattern and stretching the layer of PTFE. In another embodiment, a PTFE layer includes a layer made by providing a layer of PTFE, applying a stretching agent to at least one lateral zone of a surface of the layer in a predetermined pattern until the lateral zone is saturated with stretching agent and stretching the layer of PTFE while lateral zone of the layer of PTFE is saturated with stretching agent.

[0008] An embodiment of a multi-layered vascular graft includes a first tubular body having an outer surface and an inner surface that defines an inner lumen of the vascular graft. A second tubular body having an outer surface and an inner surface is coupled to the outer surface of the first tubular body. At least one of the first tubular body and the second tubular body includes a PTFE layer having a first lateral zone with a substantially low porosity, a low fluid permeability and no discernable node and fibril structure, and a second lateral zone which is fluid-permeable and has substantial node and fibril microstructure.

[0009] In another embodiment, a tubular structure includes a layer of PTFE having a first lateral zone that is fluid-permeable and has a substantial node and fibril microstructure and a second lateral zone with a closed cell microstructure having high density regions whose grain boundaries are directly interconnected to grain boundaries of adjacent high density regions and having no discernable node and fibril microstructure. In another embodiment, an endovascular graft includes a PTFE layer having a first lateral zone that is fluid-permeable adjacent a second lateral zone with a closed cell microstructure having high density regions whose grain boundaries are directly interconnected to grain boundaries of adjacent high density regions and having no discernable node and fibril microstructure. In yet another embodiment, a PTFE layer includes a first lateral zone with a substantially low porosity, a low liquid permeability, no discernable node and fibril structure, and a high degree of limpness and suppleness to allow mechanical manipulation or strain of the PTFE layer without significant recoil or spring back. The PTFE layer also includes a second lateral zone which is fluid-permeable and has a substantial node and fibril microstructure.

[0010] These features of embodiments will become more apparent from the following detailed description when taken in conjunction with the accompanying exemplary drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] FIG. 1 illustrates a ram extruder extruding a PTFE ribbon being taken up on a spool.

[0012] FIG. 2 illustrates a calendaring process of the PTFE ribbon of FIG. 1.

[0013] FIGS. 3 and 4 illustrate a tentering process with a stretching agent being applied to a PTFE layer during the stretching process and with portions of the tentering machine not shown for purposes of clarity of illustration.

[0014] FIGS. 5 and 6 illustrate a stretching process in the machine direction of the stretched PTFE layer of FIGS. 3 and 4.

[0015] FIGS. 7 and 8 illustrate a final calendaring or densification process performed on a stretched PTFE layer.

[0016] FIG. 8A illustrates a method of application of a stretching agent in a preselected pattern during a transverse stretching process in a direction that is substantially orthogonal to a machine direction by a tentering machine in order to produce PTFE layers having characteristics which may vary across the layer in a desired pattern.

[0017] FIG. 8B illustrates as side view of the method of FIG. 8A with portions of the tentering machine not shown for purposes of clarity of illustration.

[0018] FIG. 8C is an enlarged view of an alternative embodiment of a portion of the PTFE layer of FIG. 8A containing stretching agent in a preselected pattern, taken within the encircled portion 8C of FIG. 8A.

[0019] FIG. 8D is an enlarged view of an alternative embodiment of a portion of the stretched PTFE layer of FIG. 8A having a pattern of varied permeability, taken within encircled portion 8D of FIG. 8A.

[0020] FIG. 8E is an enlarged view of an alternative embodiment of a portion of the PTFE layer of FIG. 8A containing stretching agent in a preselected pattern, taken within the encircled portion 8C of FIG. 8A.

[0021] FIG. 8F is an enlarged view of an alternative embodiment of a portion of the stretched PTFE layer of FIG. 8A having a pattern of varied fluid permeability, taken within encircled portion 8D of FIG. 8A.

[0022] FIG. 8G is an enlarged view of an alternative embodiment of a portion of the PTFE layer of FIG. 8A containing stretching agent in a preselected pattern, taken within the encircled portion 8C of FIG. 8A.

[0023] FIG. 8H is an enlarged view of an alternative embodiment of a portion of the stretched PTFE layer of FIG. 8A having a pattern of varied fluid permeability, taken within encircled portion 8D of FIG. 8A.

[0024] FIG. 8I is an enlarged view of an alternative embodiment of a portion of the PTFE layer of FIG. 8A containing stretching agent in a preselected pattern, taken within the encircled portion 8C of FIG. 8A.

[0025] FIG. 8J is an enlarged view of an alternative embodiment of a portion of the stretched PTFE layer of FIG. 8A having a pattern of varied fluid permeability, taken within encircled portion 8D of FIG. 8A.

[0026] FIG. 8K is an enlarged view of an alternative embodiment of a portion of the PTFE layer of FIG. 8A containing stretching agent in a preselected pattern, taken within the encircled portion 8C of FIG. 8A.

[0027] FIG. 8L is an enlarged view of an alternative embodiment of a portion of the stretched PTFE layer of FIG. 8A having a pattern of varied fluid permeability, taken within encircled portion 8D of FIG. 8A.

[0028] FIG. 9 is a scanning electron microscope (SEM) image of a PTFE layer at a magnification of 20,000.

[0029] FIG. 10 is a SEM image of the PTFE layer of FIG. 9 at a magnification of FIG. 11 is a SEM image of the PTFE layer of FIG. 9 at a magnification of FIG. 12 is a SEM image of the PTFE layer of FIG. 9 at a magnification of FIG. 13 is a SEM image of the PTFE layer of FIG. 9 at a magnification of 500.

[0030] FIG. 14 schematically illustrates a composite PTFE film that comprises a PTFE layer having low or substantially no fluid permeability and a porous PTFE layer.

[0031] FIG. 15 schematically illustrates a simplified tubular structure that comprises an outer layer having low or substantially no fluid permeability and a fluid-permeable inner layer.

[0032] FIG. 16 schematically illustrates a simplified tubular structure that comprises a layer having low or substantially no fluid permeability and a fluid-permeable outer layer.

[0033] FIG. 17 illustrates an embodiment of an endovascular graft having a network of inflatable conduits.

[0034] FIGS. 18 to 20 are transverse cross sectional views of an inflatable conduit of the graft of FIG. 17.

[0035] FIG. 21 is a transverse cross sectional view of an embodiment of a tubular inflatable conduit.

[0036] FIG. 22 is an elevational view that illustrates another embodiment of an inflatable endovascular graft.

[0037] FIG. 23 illustrates an embodiment of an inflatable bifurcated endovascular

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0038] Embodiments of the present invention relate generally to thin PTFE layers, PTFE films, composite films having two or more PTFE layers and methods of manufacturing the PTFE layers, films and composite films. Some particular embodiments are directed to thin PTFE layers having low or substantially no fluid permeability with a microstructure that does not include significant fibril and nodal structure as is common with expanded PTFE layers. It may also be desirable for some embodiments of such thin PTFE layers that have a high degree of limpness and suppleness so to allow mechanical manipulation or strain of such a PTFE layer without significant recoil or spring back. Such PTFE layers may be manufactured and used for construction of endovascular grafts or other medical devices. For some applications, embodiments of PTFE films may include one or more discrete layers of PTFE that are secured together to form a composite film. As used herein, the term "composite film" generally refers to a sheet of two or more PTFE layers that have surfaces in contact with each other, and in some embodiments, may be secured to each other such that the PTFE layers are not easily separated. The individual PTFE layers used in some of the PTFE composite film embodiments herein may have the thinness and low fluid permeability characteristics discussed above in combination with other layers having the same or different properties. Some PTFE layer embodiments have a low fluid permeability while other PTFE layer embodiments have no or substantially no fluid permeability. A PTFE layer having a low fluid permeability may, for some embodiments, be distinguished from the permeability of a standard layer of expanded PTFE by comparing fluid permeability based on Gurley test results in the form of a Gurley Number or "Gurley Seconds". The Gurley Seconds is determined by measuring the time necessary for a given volume of air, typically, 25 cc, 100 cc or 300 cc, to flow through a standard 1 square inch of material or film under a standard pressure, such as 12.4 cm column of water. Such testing may be carried out with a Gurley Densometer, made by Gurley Precision Instruments, Troy, N.Y. A standard porous fluid-permeable layer of expanded PTFE may have a Gurley Number of less than about 15 seconds, specifically, less than about 10 seconds, where the volume of air used is about 100 cc. In contrast, embodiments of layers of PTFE discussed herein having low fluid

permeability may have a Gurley Number of greater than about 1500 seconds where 100 cc of air is used in the test. An embodiment of a PTFE layer discussed herein having no or substantially no fluid permeability may have a Gurley Number of greater than about 12 hours, or up to a Gurley Number that is essentially infinite, or too high to measure, indicating no measurable fluid permeability. Some PTFE layer embodiments having substantially no fluid permeability may have a Gurley Number at 100 cc of air of greater than about 1×106 seconds. Stretched PTFE layers processed by embodiments of methods discussed herein having no discernable node or fibril microstructure may initially have substantially no fluid permeability. However, such PTFE layer embodiments may subsequently be stretched during a manufacturing process, such as the manufacture of an inflatable endovascular graft, during which process the PTFE layer may become more fluid-permeable and achieve a level of low permeability as discussed above.

[0039] FIGS. 1-8 illustrate processing of PTFE material to form a thin, stretched PTFE layer having low or substantially no liquid permeability for particular liquids, such as water based liquids. Such an embodiment may be useful where it is desirable to exclude water based fluids and other fluids, such as body fluids of a patient. Some PTFE layer embodiments discussed herein may also be substantially impermeable to air and other gases. As such, embodiments of the stretched PTFE layers are not "expanded" in the conventional sense as taught by Gore in U.S. Pat. No. 3,953,566. For example, the stretched PTFE layers may be substantially thinned during stretching whereas prior art "expansion" processes typically leave the thickness of the expanded material somewhat unchanged but generate distinct nodal and fibril microstructure along with increased porosity and permeability in order to accommodate the expansion of the layer in plane of the layer.

[0040] Referring to FIG. 1, a fine PTFE resin powder is compounded with an extrusion agent such as a liquid lubricant to form a PTFE compound 10. A variety of different PTFE resins may be used such as the lower extrusion ratio, higher molecular weight fine powder coagulated dispersion resins (available from 3M Corporation, Ausimont Corporation, Daikin Corporation, DuPont and ICI Corporation) The PTFE molecules used in these resins typically have an average molecular weight of from about 20 million to about 50 million or more. Optionally, an additive, such as powdered or liquid color pigment or other resin additive may be added to the PTFE resin and lubricant to change the properties of the final PTFE layer. For example, a fluorinated copolymer may be added (such as perfluoropropylvinylether-modified PTFE) to improve the bondability of the PTFE layer. Additive is typically provided in a mass amount that is less than 2% of the mass of the PTFE resin, but it may be provided in any amount that produces a desired result. Additive may be combined with the PTFE resin before the lubricant is added so as to ensure homogenous mixing of the additive throughout the PTFE resin.

[0041] A variety of different types of extrusion and stretching agents, or lubricants, may be compounded with the PTFE powder resin. Some examples of lubricants that may be mixed with the PTFE resin include, but are not limited to, isoparaffin lubricants such as ISOPAR® H, ISOPAR® K and ISOPAR® M all of which are manufactured by ExxonMobil Corporation. Additional lubricants include mineral spirits, naphtha, MEK, toluene, alcohols such as isopropyl alcohol, and any

other chemical that is capable of saturating the PTFE resin. In addition, two or more lubricants may be blended together for some lubricant embodiments. The amount of lubricant added to the PTFE resin may vary depending on the type of lubricant used as well as the desired properties of a final PTFE layer. Typically, however, the percent mass of lubricant for some compound embodiments may vary from about 15% to about 25% of the compound mass; specifically, from about 17% to about 22% of the compound mass, and more specifically from about 18% to about 20% of the compound mass.

[0042] The PTFE resin and lubricant may be mixed until a substantially homogenous PTFE compound 10 is formed. Compounding of the PTFE resin and lubricant is typically carried out at a temperature below the glass transition temperature of the PTFE resin which is typically from about 55° F. to about 76° F. Compounding of the PTFE resin may be carried out at a temperature below about 50° F., and specifically, at a temperature of from about 40° F. to about 50° F., so as to reduce shearing of the fine PTFE particles. Once mixed, the PTFE compound may be stored at a temperature of above approximately 100° F., and typically from about 110° F. to about 120° F. for a time period that ensures that the lubricant has absorbed through the PTFE resin particles. The storage time period typically may be greater than about six hours, and may vary depending on the resin and lubricant used.

[0043] Once the compounded PTFE resin and lubricant 10 have been suitably prepared, the compound 10 may be placed in an extruder, such as the ram extruder 12 shown in FIG. 1. The ram extruder 12 includes a barrel 13 and a piston 14 that is configured to slide within a chamber of the barrel 13 and form a seal against an inner cylindrical surface of the barrel 13. The compound 10 is placed in the chamber of the extruder 12 between the distal end of the piston 14 and an extruder die 16 sealed to the output end 18 of the extruder 12. The ram extruder 12 may also include heat elements 20 disposed about the output end 18 of the barrel 13 which are configured to uniformly heat the output end 18 of the extruder 12. In some methods, the output end 18 of the extruder is heated before the compounded PTFE resin 10 is loaded into the chamber. An embodiment of a ram extruder 12 may include a Phillips Scientific Corporation vertical three inch hydraulic ram extruder.

[0044] Once the PTFE resin compound is loaded, the piston 14 is advanced towards the output end 18 of the extruder 12, as indicated by arrow 21 which increases the chamber pressure and forces the PTFE compound 10 to be extruded through an orifice 22 of the die 16 to form an extrudate 24. The extrudate 24 may be in the form of a ribbon or tape that is then wound onto a take up spool 26 as indicated by the arrow adjacent the take up spool in FIG. 1. The ram extrusion process represents a mechanical working of the compound 10, and introduces shear forces and pressure on the compound 10. This working of the compound results in a more cohesive material in the form of an extrudate ribbon or tape 24.

[0045] Processing conditions may be chosen to minimize the amount of lubricant that is evaporated from the PTFE extrudate ribbon 24. For example, the PTFE compound 10 may be extruded at a temperature that is above the glass transition temperature, and typically above 90° F. The PTFE extrudate ribbon 24 is generally fully densified, non-porous and typically has approximately 100% of its original amount of lubricant upon extrusion from the die 16. The die 16 may also be configured to produce an extrudate 24 having other configurations, such as a tubular configuration. Also, for

some methods, the PTFE compound **10** may be processed to form a preform billet before it is placed in the extruder **12**. In addition, a de-ionizing air curtain may optionally be used to reduce static electricity in the area of the extruder **12**. In one example, the ram extruder **12** has a barrel **13** with a chamber having an inside transverse diameter of about 1 inch to about 6 inches in diameter. Embodiments of the die **16** may have orifices **22** configured to produce an extrudate ribbon or tape **24** having a width of about 1 inch to about 24 inches and a thickness of about 0.020 inch to about 0.040 inch, specifically, about 0.025 inch to about 0.035 inch.

[0046] After extrusion, the wet PTFE extrudate ribbon **24** may be calendered in a first direction or machine direction, as indicated by arrow **27**, to reduce the thickness of the PTFE extrudate ribbon **24** into a PTFE layer **28** as shown in FIG. 2. During the calendering process, the width of the PTFE extrudate ribbon **24** and calendered PTFE layer **28** changes little while the PTFE extrudate ribbon **24** is lengthened in the machine direction. In one embodiment, the PTFE extrudate ribbon **24** and calendered PTFE layer **28** may be about 6 inches to about 10 inches in width. The calendering process both lengthens and reduces the thickness of the PTFE ribbon **24** to form PTFE layer **28** which is taken up by spool **32**. During calendering, the PTFE extrudate ribbon **24** may be calendered between adjustable heated rollers **30** to mechanically compress and reduce the thickness of the PTFE ribbon **24**. As such, the calendering process also encompasses a second mechanical working of the compound **10**. Suitable equipment for the calendering process includes a custom 12 inch vertical calendar machine manufactured by IMC Corporation, Birmingham, Ala.

[0047] While it may be possible to store the PTFE extrudate ribbon **24** for an extended period of time after extrusion, lubricant in the PTFE extrudate ribbon **24** will evaporate from the ribbon **24** during the storage period. As such, it may be desirable in some instances to calender the PTFE extrudate ribbon **24** almost immediately after extrusion so as to better control the lubricant level in the PTFE extrudate ribbon **24**. For some embodiments, the PTFE ribbon **24** will have a lubricant content of about 15% to about 25% immediately prior to calendering.

[0048] Depending on the calendering speed and roller positioning, the PTFE ribbon **24** may be calendered down to produce a PTFE layer **28** of any suitable thickness. The reduction ratio of an embodiment of the calendering process, which is a ratio of the thickness of the PTFE extrudate ribbon **24** to the thickness of the calendered PTFE layer **28**, may be between about 3:1 to about 75:1, and specifically between about 7.5:1 to about 15:1. In one particular embodiment, for a PTFE extrudate ribbon **24** having a thickness of about 0.030 inches, calendering may reduce the thickness to about 0.001 inch to about 0.006 inch, specifically, between about 0.002 inch to about 0.004 inch. In some instances, the PTFE ribbon **24** may be calendered to a PTFE layer **28** which has a thickness that is slightly greater than a final desired thickness, so that the final stretch of the PTFE ribbon **24** causes the final PTFE layer **28** to have its desired thickness.

[0049] The calendering temperatures and processing parameters may be chosen so that the calendered PTFE layer **28** still has a significant amount of residual lubricant after the calendering process. For this embodiment, the adjustable rollers **30** may be heated to a temperature between about 100° F. and about 200° F., and specifically between about 120° F. and about 160° F. during the calendering process. After cal-

endering, a residual amount of lubricant will remain in the PTFE layer **28** which may typically be between about 10% to about 22% lubricant by weight remaining, specifically about 15% to about 20% lubricant by weight.

[0050] Once the PTFE ribbon **24** has been calendered to produce PTFE layer **28**, PTFE layer **28** may then be mechanically stretched transversely (also called the cross machine direction), in the longitudinal direction (also called the machine direction), both of these directions or any other suitable direction or combination of directions, in order to thin the PTFE layer **28**, generate a suitable microstructure and mechanically work the PTFE. It should be noted that although this specification describes a process whereby a PTFE layer is stretched transversely, then stretched longitudinally and then densified, the order these steps are performed in may be changed. For example, a PTFE layer may be first stretched longitudinally, then stretched transversely. Such a layer may optionally then be densified, as discussed below. For the transverse stretching process shown in FIGS. 3 and 4, a tentering machine **34** may be used to mechanically stretch the calendered PTFE layer **28** into a stretched PTFE layer **36**. One embodiment of a suitable tentering machine **34** includes a 60 inch wide by 28 foot long tenter having a T-6 10 horsepower drive unit, manufactured by Gessner Industries, Concord, N.C.

[0051] For some embodiments, in order to produce desired thickness, porosity, permeability as well as mechanical properties, process parameters such as temperature, stretch ratios and material lubricant content of PTFE layer **28**, may be controlled before and during the stretching process. As such, for some embodiments, a stretching agent or lubricant **40** may optionally be applied to the calendered PTFE layer **28** during the stretching process as shown in FIGS. 3 and 4. Applying the stretching agent **40** to the PTFE layer **28** prior to or during the stretching process of the PTFE layer **28** may be used to control the lubricant content of the stretched PTFE layer **36**. This technique may be used to provide characteristics to the stretched PTFE layer **36** such as thinness, low porosity and low or substantially no permeability. This method embodiment also allows for the stretched PTFE layer **36** to have a high degree of limpness and suppleness to allow mechanical manipulation or strain of such a PTFE layer without significant recoil or spring back which may be particularly useful for some applications. If a high density, liquid and gas-impermeable PTFE layer **28** is desired, the PTFE layer **28** may be saturated throughout the thickness of the PTFE layer **28** with one or more stretching agents **40** during stretching. If a more porous PTFE layer **28** is desired, a lesser amount of stretching agent **40** will be applied onto the PTFE layer **28**. Stretching the PTFE layer **28** may be carried out for some embodiments at a temperature of about 80° F. to about 100° F., specifically, about 85° F. to about 95° F.

[0052] The stretching agent **40** may be the same lubricant used to form the PTFE compound **10** or it may be a different lubricant or combination of lubricants. In some embodiments, the stretching agent may be applied in sufficient quantities to the PTFE layer **28** to saturate the PTFE layer **28** during the stretching process. The stretching agent may be applied by a variety of methods to a surface, such as the upper surface **38**, of the PTFE layer **28** during the stretching process. For example, the stretching agent **40** may be sprayed over the entire layer **28**, or only on selected portions of the PTFE layer **28** by a spray mechanism **42** to the upper surface **38** of the PTFE layer **28**. The stretching agent **40** is applied to

the PTFE layer 28 after the PTFE layer 28 unwinds from spool 32 and passes under the spray mechanism 42. The stretching agent 40 may be applied uniformly over one or both sides of the PTFE layer 28, on only one side of the PTFE layer 28, or only on selected portions of the PTFE layer 28 at a temperature of typically about 70° F. to about 135° F., specifically, about 105° F. to about 125° F., and more specifically, about 110° F. to about 120° F.

[0053] If a PTFE layer having low or substantially no fluid permeability is desired, the PTFE layer 28 will be stretched in one or more directions while fully saturated until the desired thickness is achieved. It should be noted that as the PTFE layer 28 is stretched, the capacity of the resulting stretched PTFE layer 36 to absorb stretching agent 40 increases. As such, if it is desirable to maintain a saturated status of the PTFE layer 28 and stretched PTFE layer 36, it may be necessary to add stretching agent multiple times or over a large area in order to maintain that saturated state of the PTFE layer 36 and the effect of the stretching agent 40 temperature (about 110° F. to about 120° F.) for a period of time. As such, stretching agent 40 may be added prior to the initiation of the stretching process or at any time during the stretching process. A method whereby stretching agent 40 is applied to the PTFE layer during the stretching process may allow for the formation of discernable node and fibril microstructure creation during the stretching process prior to application of the stretching agent 40 to the PTFE layer; however, thinning of the PTFE layer will still take place once the stretching agent 40 has been applied and stretching continues.

[0054] FIG. 4 illustrates the stretching agent 40 being applied to upper surface 38 of the PTFE layer 28 by spray mechanism 42 as the PTFE layer 28 is being stretched transversely. For saturated stretching embodiments, it may be necessary to apply sufficient stretching agent so as to pool or puddle the stretching agent on the upper surface 38 of the PTFE layer 28. In such a case, the pooled or puddled stretching agent may be spread over the upper surface 38 of the PTFE layer 28 by a skimming member 44 that has a smooth contact edge 46 adjacent the upper surface 38 of the PTFE layer 28. The skimming member 44 is disposed adjacent the spray mechanism 42 displaced from the spray mechanism in the machine direction of the PTFE layer 28 such that the stretching agent 40 applied by the spray mechanism 42 runs into the skimming member 44 and is spread by the motion of the stretching agent 40 and PTFE layer 28 relative to the skimming member 44. The skimming member 44 may be in contact with the upper surface 38 of the PTFE layer 28 or may also be disposed above the upper surface 38, depending on the desired configuration of the set up, the type of stretching agent being used as well as other factors. Multiple skimming members may be used with some or all of the skimming members having a smooth contact edge or alternatively a grooved/patterned contact edge.

[0055] Embodiments of methods discussed herein may be useful to reduce a thickness of the PTFE layer 28 to a stretched PTFE layer 36 of any thickness down to about 0.00005 inch, but typically from about 0.00005 inch and 0.005 inch. Typical transverse stretch ratios may be from about 3:1 to about 20:1. In one embodiment, a calendared PTFE layer 28 having a width of about 3 inches to about 6 inches, may be transversely stretched, as shown in FIGS. 3 and 4, into a stretched PTFE layer 36 having a width of about 20 inches to about 60 inches. This represents a stretch ratio of about 3:1 to about 12:1. In another embodiment, a calendared

PTFE layer 28 having a width of about 3.5 inches to about 4.5 inches, may be transversely stretched, as shown in FIGS. 3 and 4, into a stretched PTFE layer 36 having a width of about 20 inches to about 60 inches. This represents a stretch ratio of about 7.8:1 to about 13:1.

[0056] As discussed above, the thickness, porosity, average pore size and fluid permeability of the PTFE layers 36 may be affected by the amount and temperature of stretching agent 40 applied to the layer 36 prior to or during stretching. In addition, the temperature of the PTFE layer, the type of stretching agent that is applied to the PTFE layer, and the stretch rate may also affect the thickness, porosity, average pore size and fluid permeability of the PTFE layer 36. By adjusting these parameters, these characteristics may be optimized in order to produce a PTFE layer that is suited to a particular application. For example, if the PTFE layer 36 is used as a moisture barrier for clothing, the parameters may be adjusted to produce an average pore size of less than about 6.0 microns. Alternatively, if the PTFE layer 36 is used in an endovascular graft that benefits from tissue in-growth, the average pore size is adjusted to be greater than 6.0 microns. In other embodiments, where the PTFE layer 36 is a barrier layer for use in an endovascular graft, the pore size may be smaller, such as between about 0.01 microns and about 5.0 microns. In addition, embodiments of the stretched PTFE layer 36 are fusible and deformable and may easily be fused with other PTFE layers having different properties. At any point after the PTFE layer 28 is stretched, the stretched PTFE layer 36 may be sintered to amorphyously lock the microstructure of the PTFE layer 36. Sintering may be performed to combine the stretched PTFE layer 36 with other layers of PTFE to form multi-layer films, such as those used for endovascular grafts and the like discussed below.

[0057] The stretched PTFE layer optionally may be subjected to a second stretching process, as shown in FIGS. 3, 4, 5 and 6, wherein the stretched PTFE layer 36 is formed into a twice-stretched PTFE layer 46. Once again, as discussed above, it is important to note that although the method embodiments discussed herein are directed to a first transverse stretch and subsequently to a longitudinal or machine direction stretch, the order of the stretch direction steps may be reversed and other combinations of stretch directions and numbers are also contemplated. For example, PTFE layer 28 may be stretched twice in the machine or longitudinal direction without any transverse stretching. PTFE layer 28 may be stretched first in a longitudinal or machine direction and then in a transverse direction. In addition, a PTFE layer 28 may be stretched three or more times. Some or all of the speeds, stretch ratios, temperatures, lubricant parameters and the like as discussed herein may be the same or similar to those previously described, but need not necessarily be so. Moreover, these parameters typically will not be the same for any of these various stretching steps, regardless of the order in which they are undertaken.

[0058] This optional second stretching process subjects the PTFE layer 36 to yet another mechanical working. The second stretching process shown in FIGS. 5 and 6 is being carried out in the machine direction; however, the second stretching process may also be carried out in any other suitable direction, such as transversely. The twice-stretched PTFE layer 46 is wound onto spool 48 after undergoing the second stretching process. Additional stretching agent 40 optionally may be applied to a surface of the stretched PTFE layer 36 as the layer 36 is being stretched a second time. If higher porosity and

fluid permeability are desired, the second stretch may be performed with the stretched layer **36** in a dry state without the addition of lubricant during the second stretch. If the stretched PTFE layer **36** has residual lubricant without additional lubricant added, the second stretching process will generate a microstructure having significant nodes connected by fibrils. The second stretching process may be carried out at a temperature of about 85° F. to about 95° F. for some embodiments. The stretch ratio for the second stretch may be up to about 20:1, specifically, about 6:1 to about 10:1.

[0059] If the PTFE layer **28** is stretched in two or more directions, the rate of stretching in the two directions; e.g., the machine direction and the off-axis or transverse direction, may have different or the same stretch rates. For example, when the PTFE layer **28** is being stretched in the machine direction (e.g., first direction), the rate of stretching is typically in the range from about two percent to about 100 percent per second; specifically, from about four percent to about 20 percent per second, and more specifically about five percent to about ten percent per second. In contrast, when stretching in the cross machine or transverse direction, the rate of stretching may be in the range from about one percent to about 300 percent per second, specifically from about ten percent to about 100 percent per second, and more specifically about 15 percent to about 25 percent per second.

[0060] Stretching in the different directions may be carried out at the same temperatures or at different temperatures. For example, stretching in the machine direction is generally carried out at a temperature below about 572° F., and for some embodiments, below about 239° F. In contrast, stretching in the transverse direction is typically carried out at a temperature above the glass transition temperature, and usually from about 80° F. to about 100° F. Stretching PTFE layers **28** at lower temperatures will reduce stretching agent **40** evaporation and retain the stretching agent **40** in the PTFE layer **28** for a longer period of time during processing.

[0061] Either the stretched PTFE layer **36** or the twice-stretched PTFE layer **46** optionally may be calendered in order to further thin and densify the material. The twice-stretched PTFE layer **46** is shown being calendered in FIGS. **7** and **8**. In this example, the twice-stretched PTFE layer **46** is unwound from spool **48**, passed through calender rollers **50** and **52**, formed into a densified layer **54**, then taken up on spool **54**. The calender machine may be the same machine or a different machine as that indicated in FIG. **2** and discussed above. This final calendering or densification of PTFE layer **46** generally produces a highly densified PTFE layer **54** that has no discernable microstructure features, such as pores, and has low or substantially no fluid permeability. The methods of compressing and stretching PTFE layers may both be used to control thinning of the PTFE layer and the microstructure that results from the thinning process. The densified PTFE layer **54** may also lack the suppleness and limpness mechanical properties of the stretched PTFE layers **36** and **46** discussed above. The rollers **50** and **52** may be adjusted to have any suitable separation to produce a PTFE layer **54** having a thickness of about 0.00005 inch to about 0.005 inch. The rollers **50** and **52** may also be heated during the calendering process, with typical temperatures being from about 90° F. to about 250° F.; specifically, from about 120° F. to about 160° F.; more specifically, from about 130° F. to about 150° F.

[0062] The following example describes specific methods of manufacturing of the stretched PTFE layers **36**. In this embodiment, 1000 grams of resin are compounded with an

isoparaffin based lubricant; specifically, ISOPAR® M, in a mass ratio of lubricant-to-PTFE compound from about 15% to about 25%. Compounding of the PTFE resin and lubricant is carried out at a temperature below 50° F., which is well below the glass transition temperature of the PTFE resin of between about 57° F. to about 75° F.

[0063] The PTFE compound **10** may be formed into a billet and stored at a temperature of about 105° F. to about 125° F. for six or more hours to ensure that the lubricant substantially has penetrated and absorbed through the resin. Thereafter, the PTFE compound **10** is placed in an extruder **12**, as shown in FIG. **1**. The PTFE compound **10** may then be paste extruded from the orifice **22** of the die **16** of the extruder **12** at a temperature above the resin glass transition temperature. In one embodiment, the paste is extruded at a temperature from about 80° F. to 120° F. A reduction ratio, e.g., a ratio of a cross sectional area of the PTFE compound **10** before extrusion to the cross section area of the PTFE extrudate **24** after extrusion, may be from about 10:1 to about 400:1, and specifically may be from about 80:1 to about 120:1. The extruder **12** may be a horizontal extruder or a vertical extruder. The orifice **22** of the extrusion die **16** determines the final cross sectional configuration of the extruded PTFE ribbon **24**. The orifice **22** shape or configuration of the extrusion die **16** may be tubular, square, rectangular or any other suitable profile. It may be desirable to preform the PTFE compound (resin and lubricant) into a billet.

[0064] The PTFE extrudate ribbon **24** is then calendered, as shown in FIG. **2**, at a temperature from about 100° F. to about 160° F. to reduce a thickness of the PTFE ribbon **24** and form a PTFE layer or film **28**. The temperature at calendering may be controlled by controlling the temperature of the rollers **30** of the calender machine. The PTFE layer may be calendered down to a thickness from about 0.001 inch to about 0.006 inch, and specifically, down to a thickness of about 0.002 inch to about 0.003 inch. At the end of the calendering, the calendered PTFE layer **28** may have a lubricant content of about 10% by weight to about 20% by weight.

[0065] Referring again to FIGS. **3** and **4**, after calendering, one side or both sides of the calendered PTFE layer **28** are sprayed with an isoparaffin-based stretching agent **40** at a prescribed temperature so that the PTFE film or layer **28** is flooded and fully saturated through the thickness of the PTFE layer **28**. The saturated, calendered PTFE layer may then be stretched in a direction that is substantially orthogonal to the calendering direction by a tentering machine **34** to reduce a thickness of the PTFE layer **28** and form a stretched PTFE layer **36**. The stretched PTFE layer **36** may have a thickness of about 0.00005 inch to about 0.005 inch; specifically, the stretched PTFE layer **36** may have a thickness of about 0.0002 inch to about 0.002 inch. The PTFE layer **28** typically is tentering or stretched at an elevated temperature above the glass transition temperature, specifically, from about 80° F. to about 100° F., more specifically, about 85° F. to about 95° F.

[0066] Wet tentering with the stretching agent **40** allows the PTFE layer **28** to be thinned without creating substantial porosity and fluid permeability in the stretched PTFE layer **36**. While the stretched PTFE layer **36** will have a porosity, its porosity and pore size typically will not be large enough to be permeable to liquids, and often will be small enough to have substantially no fluid permeability. In addition, the stretched PTFE layer embodiment **36** does not have the conventional node and fibril microstructure but instead has a closed cell microstructure in which boundaries of adjacent nodes are

directly connected with each other. The fluid-impermeable stretched PTFE film or layer 36 typically may have a density from about 0.5 g/cm³ to about 1.5 g/cm³, but it may have a larger or smaller density for some embodiments. In addition, with regard to all of the methods of processing layers of PTFE discussed above, any of the PTFE layers produced by these methods may also be sintered at any point in the above processes in order to substantially fix the microstructure of the PTFE layer. A typical sintering process may be to expose the PTFE layer to a temperature of about 350° C. to about 380° C. for several minutes; specifically, about 2 minutes to about 5 minutes.

[0067] In another aspect of the methods and PTFE layers discussed herein, the PTFE layer 28 may be selectively lubricated in a predetermined horizontal or lateral spatial pattern with a stretching agent 40. The predetermined horizontal spatial pattern may be formed from various lateral zones or sections which may each have varying levels of stretching agent 40 content or stretching agent 40 content gradients within and/or between lateral zones. Lateral zones of a PTFE layer can extend in any direction across a layer of PTFE, including transversely, longitudinally or any direction in between these directions. Lateral zones of a layer of PTFE are distinguishable from a thickness gradient of stretching agent 40 content whereby the content of stretching agent 40 varies stepwise or continuously through the thickness of a layer of PTFE. Selective application of the stretching agent 40 by spray mechanism 42 to a surface of a layer of PTFE may be carried out using the methods described herein or using other conventional methods. The levels of stretching agent 40 contained within the various lateral zones of the PTFE layer 28 may vary from about 0 percent stretching agent content by weight to a level of substantial saturation of stretching agent 40.

[0068] PTFE layer 28 having a predetermined pattern of stretching agent 40 may be stretched in at least one direction such that the lateral zones of the stretched PTFE layer 36 that contained more stretching agent 40 during stretching will have a lower permeability (e.g., substantially impermeable), while the lateral zones of the stretched PTFE layer 36 that contained less stretching agent 40 during stretching will have a higher permeability. Typically, the lateral zones of the stretched layer 36 that contained more stretching agent 40 may also have a reduced thickness relative to the lateral zones that contained less stretching agent 40 during the stretching process. In some embodiments, it may be desirable to have lateral zones or regions of the PTFE layer 28 that are substantially saturated with stretching agent 40 adjacent lateral zones or regions of PTFE layer 28 that have a low enough stretching agent content to allow expansion of the PTFE layer so as to produce a substantial node and fibril microstructure with relatively high fluid permeability. Stretching may be carried out in the machine direction, in a direction that is substantially transverse or orthogonal to the machine direction, or any direction in between. Alternatively, it may be possible to stretch the PTFE layer 28 radially about a point.

[0069] Referring to FIGS. 8A-8D, PTFE layer 28 may have stretching agent 40 applied in a predetermined pattern to the PTFE layer 28, such as the exemplary checker board pattern shown in FIG. 8C (which shows an enlarged view of a portion of the PTFE layer 28). This checker board pattern includes rectangular lateral zones 60 which are substantially saturated with stretching agent 40 throughout the thickness of the lateral zones 60 and which are visible on the surface of the layer

of PTFE. The checker board pattern also includes rectangular lateral zones 62 which have a significantly lower stretching agent 40 content throughout the thickness of the zones 62. Upon stretching, lateral zones 60 and 62 transform into lateral zones 64 and 66, respectively, of stretched PTFE layer 36, as shown in FIG. 8D. Lateral zones 64 and 66 are elongated in the transverse direction relative to the length of zones 60 and 62 because of expansion of PTFE layer 28 in the transverse direction during the tentering process shown in FIGS. 8A and 8B. Lateral zones 60-66 represent areas on the PTFE layer 28 that extend across the surface of the PTFE layer 28 in any direction or in any shape or configuration. The checker board pattern of FIG. 8C is provided for exemplary purposes only. In general, the stretching agent content level may be substantially constant throughout a thickness of the PTFE layer 28 at any point on the PTFE layer 28 or within a particular lateral zone; however, a stretching agent content level gradient may also be present across the thickness of the PTFE layer 28 if desired. In addition, while the lateral zones 60 and 62 are described and shown in FIGS. 8C and 8D as being defined by substantially discrete stretching agent content levels, other embodiments of lateral zones could include areas of the PTFE layer 28 which include a stretching agent content level gradient in any desired direction or pattern.

[0070] FIGS. 8E-8L illustrate alternative embodiments of the effect of applying predetermined patterns and amounts of stretching agent 40 on a layer of PTFE before and after a stretching process, wherein lateral zones 60 are substantially saturated with stretching agent 40 and lateral zones 62 has a relatively low level of (or substantially no) stretching agent 40. After stretching, lateral zones 60 and 62 transform into lateral zones 64 and 66, respectively. In other alternative embodiments, FIGS. 8E and 8F show circles of relatively high or substantially saturated stretching agent 40 content and the elliptical shape the circles may assume after stretching. FIGS. 8G and 8H show, in another example, a pattern in which the rectangular cells of relatively high or substantially saturated stretching agent 40 content become square in shape after stretching. FIGS. 8I and 8J show elliptical patterns of relatively high or substantially saturated stretching agent 40 content that become circular after stretching. Finally, FIGS. 8K and 8L illustrate a bull's eye pattern that is stretched into an elliptical shape during stretching.

[0071] As discussed above, the stretching agent 40 content of lateral zones 62 may be chosen such that standard expansion takes place for the PTFE material within lateral zones 62 upon stretching. Standard expansion of PTFE may produce expanded PTFE (ePTFE) within lateral zones 64 after stretching, which typically has a substantial node and fibril microstructure that is discernable when viewed in by SEM. Lateral zones 60 may be substantially saturated with stretching agent 40 such that expansion of the PTFE layer 28 within lateral zones 60 produces PTFE material of lateral zones 64 which is thinner and less permeable than the material of lateral zones 66. For some embodiments, the PTFE material of lateral zones 64 may be substantially impermeable and may have a closed cell microstructure. The closed cell microstructure may have a plurality of interconnected nodes but is substantially free of fibrils between the nodes (when viewed at a SEM magnification of 20,000 such as shown in FIG. 9). Put another way, the material of lateral zones 64, which may be the same as or similar to the material shown in FIG. 9, shows no discernable node and fibril microstructure when viewed by SEM at a magnification of 20,000. In addition, the stretching

agent content of lateral zones **60** and **62** may be chosen such that lateral zones **64** and **66** of the stretched PTFE layer **36** may vary with respect to density, thickness, and/or porosity.

[0072] The stretching agent **40** may be applied in any pre-selected lateral spatial pattern and in any desired amount or concentration level within the lateral zones of that pattern. For some embodiments, the stretching agent **40** may be selectively applied to the PTFE layer **28** by a spray mechanism **42** that may be controlled through computer or manual control. The spray mechanism **42** shown in FIGS. **8A** and **8B** may be configured to be controllable to a substantial degree of spatial resolution so that fine preselected patterns of stretching agent **40** may be applied to the PTFE layer **28**. In some embodiments, the spray mechanism **42** may include an inkjet head, such as is commonly used on an inkjet printer device. Other embodiments of applying the stretching agent **40** may include, but are not limited to, a contact roller which may be smooth, textured or grooved. Droplets or stream application may be used with an optional skimming member or blade that may also be smooth, textured or grooved. A squeegee that is smooth, textured or grooved may also be used to spread stretching agent delivered by droplets or stream spray. Also, a sponge that is smooth, textured or grooved may be used as well as a rotating drum having a pattern disposed thereon. Silk screen type of methods and the like may also be used to apply the stretching agent **40**.

[0073] For other embodiments of methods of producing PTFE layers having lateral zones of varied fluid permeability as well as other characteristics, selective removal or reduction of stretching agent **40** content from the PTFE layer **28** in a predetermined pattern may be used as opposed to selective addition of stretching agent **40**. In such a method, a PTFE layer **28** could be produced having a high level of stretching agent **40** content, up to a saturated level, with subsequent removal of some of the stretching agent by the selective application of heat or other energy in a predetermined lateral spatial pattern. The selective application of heat selectively evaporates or boils the stretching agent from the PTFE layer **28**. In such an embodiment, an array of LED lasers **60**, or the like, could be disposed adjacent the PTFE layer **28**, as shown in FIGS. **3** and **4**. The LED laser array **60** could be controlled manually, by a computer or any other suitable means so as to apply laser energy to the PTFE layer **28** as it passes by the laser array **60**. As such, stretching agent **40** is uniformly applied to the PTFE layer **28** by the spray mechanism **42** and optional skimming member **44** as shown in FIGS. **3** and **4** so as to produce a PTFE layer **28** having a substantially uniform stretching agent **40** content level. Then, as the PTFE layer **28** passes adjacent the LED laser array **60**, the individual LED lasers of the array are selectively activated to as to produce a pattern of lateral zones, such as the lateral zones shown in FIGS. **8C-8L**. In addition to laser energy, any other suitable form of energy that can be spatially controlled could also be used. For example, radiofrequency energy, ultrasound energy and the like could also be used for selective removal or reduction of stretching agent **40** from the PTFE layer **28**. In addition, air jets or nozzles dispensing air or other gases at a specified temperature, pressure and direction may be used to selectively remove the stretching agent **40** from the PTFE layer by spraying the gas from the air jet onto the PTFE layer to either blow the stretching agent from the PTFE layer or through the PTFE layer. Also, the gas expelled from such air

jets could be heated to facilitate evaporation of the stretching agent from the point of impact of the compressed or high velocity gas from the air jets.

[0074] As discussed above, the PTFE layers **36** may or may not include a discernable node and fibril microstructure. If the stretched PTFE layers **36** or lateral zones of the stretched PTFE layers include a discernable node and fibril microstructure, the stretched PTFE layers **36** or lateral zones thereof may have a uniaxial fibril orientation, a biaxial fibril orientation, or a multi-axial fibril orientation. The stretched PTFE layers **36** or twice-stretched PTFE layers **46** within a multi-layer PTFE film may be positioned in any configuration, such that the fibrils in one PTFE layer (if any) are parallel, perpendicular, or at other angles relative to the fibrils of an adjacent PTFE layer. The stretched PTFE layers with lateral zones can be used on any of the stent graft embodiments discussed below. In some embodiments, it may be desirable to use a stretched PTFE layer with impermeable lateral zones disposed about or bordering inflatable channels and permeable lateral zones in other areas of the stent graft.

[0075] The various methods discussed above may be used to produce PTFE layers having a variety of desirable properties. The scanning electron microscope (SEM) images shown in FIGS. **9** to **13** illustrate different magnifications of a microstructure of a PTFE film or layer **110** made in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. PTFE layer **110** has a generally closed cell microstructure **112** that is substantially free of the conventional node and fibril microstructure commonly seen in expanded PTFE layers. Embodiments of the PTFE film **110** may have low fluid-permeability, or no or substantially no fluid-permeability. One or more of PTFE layer **110** may be used as a barrier layer to prevent a fluid such as a liquid or gas from permeating or escaping therethrough.

[0076] At a magnification of 20,000, as seen in FIG. **9**, the microstructure of the stretched PTFE layer **110** resembles a pocked-like structure that comprises interconnected high density regions **114** and pockets or pores **116** between some of the high density regions **114**. The PTFE film **110** may be considered to have a closed cell network structure with interconnected strands connecting high density regions **114** in which a high density region grain boundary is directly connected to a grain boundary of an adjacent high density region. Unlike conventional expanded PTFE which typically has a substantial node and fibril microstructure that is discernable when viewed at a SEM magnification of 20,000, PTFE layer **110** lacks the distinct, parallel fibrils that interconnect adjacent nodes of ePTFE and has no discernable node and fibril microstructure when viewed at a SEM magnification of 20,000, as shown in FIG. **9**. The closed cell microstructure of the PTFE layer **110** provides a layer having low or substantially no fluid permeability that may be used as "a barrier layer" to prevent liquid from passing from one side of the PTFE layer to the opposite side.

[0077] Though PTFE film or layer **110** is configured to have low or substantially no fluid permeability, PTFE layer **110** nonetheless has a porosity. The PTFE layer **110** typically has an average porosity from about 20% to about 80%, and specifically from about 30% and about 70%. In one embodiment, a PTFE film **110** has a porosity of about 30% to about 40%. In another embodiment, a PTFE layer **110** has a porosity of about 60% to about 70%. Porosity as described in these figures is meant to indicate the volume of solid PTFE material as a percentage of the total volume of the PTFE film **110**. An average pore size in the PTFE layer **110** is may be less than

about 20 microns, and specifically less than about 0.5 micron. In one embodiment, a PTFE layer **110** has an average pore size of from about 0.01 micron to about 0.5 micron. As can be appreciated, if tissue ingrowth is desired, the PTFE film **110** may have an average pore size of greater than about 6.0 microns. As described below, depending on the desired properties of the resultant PTFE layer **110**, embodiments of methods may be modified so as to vary the average porosity and average pore size of the PTFE film **110** in a continuum from 10 microns to 50 microns down to substantially less than about 0.1 micron.

[0078] PTFE layer **110** may have a density from about 0.5 g/cm³ to about 1.5 g/cm³, and specifically from about 0.6 g/cm³ to about 1.5 g/cm³. While the density of the PTFE film **110** is typically less than a density for a fully densified PTFE layer (e.g., 2.1 g/cm³), if desired, the density of the PTFE layer **110** may be densified to a higher density level so that the density of the PTFE layer **110** is comparable to a fully densified PTFE layer. FIGS. 9 to 13 illustrate a PTFE film **110** having a closed micro structural network and that is substantially impermeable to liquid and gas; other embodiments of PTFE layers may be manufactured using the methods discussed herein to have other suitable permeability values and pore sizes.

[0079] PTFE film **110** may have an average thickness that is less than about 0.005 inch, specifically from about 0.00005 inch to about 0.005 inch, and more specifically from about 0.0001 inch to about 0.002 inch. While embodiments of methods discussed herein are directed to manufacturing PTFE layers, it should be appreciated that the methods discussed may also be useful in the manufacture of other fluoropolymer-based films having substantial, low or substantially no fluid permeability. As such, the methods discussed herein are not limited to the processing of PTFE materials. For example, the processing of other fluoropolymer resin-based materials, such as copolymers of tetrafluoroethylene and other monomers, is also contemplated.

[0080] The PTFE layer and PTFE films may be used in a variety of ways. For example, the PTFE layers and PTFE films of the present invention may be used for prosthetic devices such as a vascular graft, breast implants and the like. Other applications include tubing, protective clothing, insulation, sports equipment, filters, membranes, fuel cells, ionic exchange barriers, gaskets as well as others. For some of these applications, it may be desirable to include PTFE layers that have variable characteristics with respect to lateral zones of the PTFE layers, which may be produced by the methods discussed above. Specifically, some applications may require PTFE layers that have a high permeability in one lateral zone and low or substantially no permeability in an adjacent lateral zone. PTFE films having at least two PTFE layers combined may overlap the predetermined patterns of the lateral zones of the PTFE layers to achieve a more complex patterns of varied characteristics. As such, any of the embodiments discussed below may incorporate PTFE layers, stretched PTFE layers or PTFE films that have lateral zones of varied characteristics as discussed above.

[0081] Referring now to FIG. 14, PTFE layer **110** may be combined with, bonded to, or otherwise coupled, affixed or attached, partially or completely, to at least one additional layer **118** to form a composite film **120**. Depending on the use of composite film **120**, layer **118** may be chosen to have properties that combine with the properties of layer **110** to give the desired properties in composite film **120**. The addi-

tional layer **118** may include a porous PTFE layer, a substantially non-porous PTFE layer, a gas- or liquid-permeable PTFE layer, a gas- or liquid-impermeable layer, an ePTFE layer, a non-expanded PTFE layer, a fluoropolymer layer, a non-fluoropolymer layer, or any combination thereof. In one embodiment, layer **118** is a porous, fluid-permeable, expanded PTFE layer having a conventional node and fibril microstructure. If desired, one or more reinforcing layers (not shown) optionally may be coupled to the composite PTFE film **120**. The reinforcing layer may be disposed between layers **110** or **118**, or the reinforcing layer(s) may be coupled to an exposed surface of PTFE layer **110**, PTFE layer **118**, or both. PTFE layer **110** and layer **118** may be combined, bonded to, or otherwise coupled, affixed or attached, partially or completely, to one another using any suitable method known in the art. For example, an adhesive may be used to selectively bond at least a portion of layers **110** and **118** to each other. Alternatively, heat fusion, pressure bonding, sintering, and the like may be used to bond at least a portion of layers **110** and **118** to each other.

[0082] FIGS. 15 and 16 are transverse cross-sectional views of two composite tubular structures **130** and **140**, respectively. Tubular structures **130** and **140** may be a portion or section of an endovascular graft or the like. As shown in FIG. 15, tubular structure **130** includes an inner tubular body **132** that comprises an inner surface **134** and an outer surface **136**. Tubular body **132** may comprise one or more layers of fluid-permeable PTFE. Such a fluid-permeable layer of PTFE may have a Gurley measurement of less than about 10 Gurley seconds. Tubular structure **130** further comprises an outer tubular body **138** that comprises an inner surface **137** and an outer surface **139**. Inner surface **137** of outer tubular body **138** is coupled to the outer surface **136** of the inner tubular body **132**. Tubular body **138** may comprise one or more PTFE layers having low fluid-permeability or substantially no fluid-permeability. In this configuration, inner surface **134** of the tubular body **132** defines an inner lumen **135** of tubular structure **130** and the outer surface **139** of the tubular body **138** defines an outer surface **139** of the tubular structure **130**. Tubular body **138** may be combined, bonded to, or otherwise coupled, affixed or attached, partially or completely, to the tubular body **132** through any suitable method known in the art. For example, an adhesive may be used to selectively bond at least a portion of tubular body **138** and tubular body **132** to each other. Alternatively, heat fusion, pressure bonding, sintering, and the like, or any combination thereof, may be used to bond at least a portion of tubular body **138** and tubular body **132** to each other.

[0083] As shown in FIG. 16, tubular structure **140** includes an inner tubular body **142** that comprises an inner surface **144** and an outer surface **146**. Tubular body **142** may comprise one or more layers of PTFE having low or substantially no fluid permeability. Tubular structure **140** further comprises an outer tubular body **148** that comprises an inner surface **147** and an outer surface **149**. Inner surface **147** of outer tubular body **148** is coupled to the outer surface **146** of the inner tubular body **142**. Outer tubular body **148** may comprise one or more layers of fluid-permeable PTFE. Embodiments of fluid-permeable layers of PTFE may have a Gurley measurement of less than about 10 Gurley seconds. In this configuration, inner surface **144** of the inner tubular body **142** defines an inner lumen **145** of tubular structure **140** and the outer surface **149** of the outer tubular body **148** defines an outer surface **149** of the tubular structure **140**. Tubular body **148**

maybe combined, bonded to, or otherwise coupled, affixed or attached, partially or completely, to the tubular body **142** through any suitable method known in the art. For example, an adhesive may be used to selectively bond at least a portion of tubular body **148** and tubular body **132** to each other. Alternatively, heat fusion, pressure bonding, sintering, and the like, or any combination thereof, may be used to bond at least a portion of tubular body **148** and tubular body **142** to each other.

[0084] Tubular structures **130** or **140** may define an inner diameter ID which is the diameter of the inner surface, which may define the area of flow through tubular structure **130** or **140**. An outer diameter OD, which is the diameter of the outer surface **139** or **149** of the outer tubular layer **138** or **148**. The inner diameter ID and outer diameter OD may be any desired diameter. For use in an endovascular graft, the inner diameter ID but is typically from about 10 mm to about 40 mm and the outer diameter OD is typically from about 12 mm to about 42 mm. The tubular layers may have any suitable thickness, however, fluid-impermeable PTFE layers **138** and **142** have a thickness from about 0.0005 inch and about 0.01 inch thick, and specifically from about 0.0002 inch to about 0.001 inch. Similarly, fluid-permeable PTFE layers **132** or **148** may also be any thickness desired, but typically have a thickness from about 0.0001 inch and about 0.01 inch, and specifically from about 0.0002 inch to about 0.001 inch. As can be appreciated, the thicknesses and diameters of the tubular structures **130** or **140** will vary depending on the use of the tubular structures.

[0085] Tubular structures **130** or **140** may be formed as tubes through conventional tubular extrusion processes. Typically, however, tubular structures **130** or **140** may be formed from PTFE layers **110** or **118**, as shown in FIG. **14**, that are folded on a shape forming mandrel over each other so that ends of the layers are overlapped and bonded. As another alternative, PTFE layers **110** or **118** may be helically wound about the shape forming mandrel to form the tubular structure. Some exemplary methods of forming a tubular PTFE structure is described in commonly owned, copending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/029,557 (which published as US 20030116260 A1) and entitled "Methods and Apparatus for Manufacturing an Endovascular Graft Section" and Ser. No. 10/029,584 and entitled "Endovascular Graft Joint and Method of Manufacture", both filed on Dec. 20, 2001 to Chobotov et al., and U.S. Pat. No. 6,776,604 to Chobotov et al., the complete disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0086] The films and layers discussed herein are not limited to a single porous PTFE layer **118** and a single PTFE layer or film **110** having low or substantially no fluid permeability. The composite films **120** and tubular structures **130** or **140** may include a plurality of porous fluid-permeable PTFE layers (having the same or different node and fibril size and orientation, porosity, pore size, and the like), one or more non-porous, densified PTFE layers, and/or one or more PTFE layers **110** having low or substantially no fluid permeability. For example, PTFE layer **110** having low or substantially no fluid permeability may be disposed between an inner and outer porous PTFE film or layer. The inner and outer porous PTFE layers may have varying porosities or the same porosities. In such embodiments, the PTFE layer **110** may have a reduced thickness relative to the porous PTFE layers. In other embodiments, however, the PTFE layer **110** may have the same thickness or larger thickness than the porous PTFE layers. As an alternative embodiment to FIGS. **15** and **16**,

tubular structures **130** or **140** may comprise inner and outer tubular bodies that both have low or substantially no fluid permeability.

[0087] Referring now to FIG. **17**, a tubular structure that is in the form of an inflatable endovascular graft **50** is shown. For the purposes of this application, with reference to endovascular graft devices, the term "proximal" describes the end of the graft that will be oriented towards the oncoming flow of bodily fluid, typically blood, when the device is deployed within a body passageway. The term "distal" therefore describes the graft end opposite the proximal end. Graft **150** has a proximal end **151** and a distal end **152** and includes a generally tubular structure or graft body section **153** comprised of one or more layers of fusible material, including such materials as PTFE and ePTFE. The inner surface of the tubular structure defines an inner diameter and acts as a luminal surface for flow of fluids therethrough. The outer surface of the tubular structure defines an abluminal surface that is adapted to be positioned adjacent the body lumen wall, within the weakened portion of the body lumen, or both. Note that although FIG. **17** shows an inflatable endovascular graft, the layers and films of the present invention may be used in non-inflatable endovascular grafts as well, in addition to other medical and non-medical applications.

[0088] A proximal inflatable cuff **156** may be disposed at or near a proximal end **151** of graft body section **153** and a distal inflatable cuff **157** may be disposed at or near a graft body section distal end **152**. Graft body section **153** forms a longitudinal lumen that is configured to confine a flow of fluid, such as blood, therethrough. Graft **150** may be manufactured to have any desired length and internal and external diameter but typically ranges in length from about 5 cm to about 30 cm; specifically from about 10 cm to about 30 cm. If desired, a stent **159** may be attached at the proximal end **151** and/or the distal end **152** of the graft **150**. Depending on the construction of the cuffs **156** and **157** and graft body section **153**, inflation of cuffs **156** and **157**, when not constrained (such as, e.g., by a vessel or other body lumen), may cause the cuffs **156** and **157** to assume a generally annular or toroidal shape with a generally semicircular longitudinal cross-section. Inflatable cuffs **156** and **157** may be designed to generally, however, conform to the shape of the vessel within which it is deployed. When fully inflated, cuffs **156** and **157** may have an outside diameter ranging from about 10 mm to about 45 mm; specifically from about 16 mm to about 42 mm.

[0089] At least one inflatable channel **158** may be disposed between and in fluid communication with proximal inflatable cuff **156** and optional distal inflatable cuff **157**. Inflatable channel **158** in the FIG. **17** example has a helical configuration and provides structural support to graft body section **153** when inflated to contain an inflation medium. Inflatable channel **158** further prevents kinking and twisting of the tubular structure or graft body section when it is deployed within angled or tortuous anatomies as well as during remodeling of body passageways, such as the aorta and iliac arteries, within which graft **150** may be deployed. Together with proximal and distal cuffs **156** and **157**, inflatable channel **158** forms an inflatable network over the length of the body **153**. Depending on the desired characteristics of the endovascular graft **150**, at least one layer of the graft may be a PTFE layer having low or substantially no fluid permeability such as PTFE layer or film **110**. The PTFE layer may be one of the layers that forms the inflatable channels **158**, or the PTFE layer may surround or be underneath the inflatable channel **158** and cuffs **156** and **157**.

[0090] In addition, it may be desirable for some embodiments to include a PTFE layer **110** that has varied permeability across lateral zones of the PTFE layer **110** whereby the characteristic of a lateral zone of the PTFE layer **110** corresponds to the function of the PTFE layer in the lateral zone. For example, instead of including a single PTFE layer **110** of PTFE material that has substantially no fluid permeability, the layer may include lateral zones of PTFE material that has substantially no fluid permeability that correspond to the portion of the PTFE layer **110** that will be adjacent the inflatable channel **158** and cuffs **156** and **157**. In this way, the inflatable channel **158** and inflatable cuffs **156** and **157** can be made resistant to fluid loss, while the graft body retains its fluid-permeable character adjacent the inflatable channel **158** and inflatable cuffs **156** and **157**. This type of arrangement could be included in any of the graft embodiments discussed herein.

[0091] Graft body **153** may be formed of two or more layers or strips of PTFE that are selectively fused or otherwise adhered together as described herein, to form the inflatable cuffs **156** and **157** and inflatable channel **158** therebetween. A detailed description of some methods of manufacturing a multi-layered graft are described in co-pending and commonly owned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/029,557 (which published as US 20030116260 A1); Ser. No. 10/029,584; U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/168,053, filed Jun. 14, 2002 and entitled "Inflatable Intraluminal Graft" to Murch, and U.S. Pat. No. 6,776,604 to Chobotov et al., the complete disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0092] FIGS. **18** to **21** illustrate transverse cross sectional views of different embodiments of inflatable channel **158**. As can be appreciated, the embodiments of FIGS. **18** to **21** may also be applicable to the proximal and distal cuffs **156** and **157**. Inflatable channel **158** defines an inflatable space **162** that is created between an inner layer **164** and outer layer **166**. If desired an inflation medium **167** may be delivered into the space **162** to inflate inflatable space **162**. Inflation medium **167** optionally may include a deliverable agent **168** as shown in FIGS. **18** to **21**, such as a therapeutic agent **168** that may be configured to be diffused in a controlled manner or otherwise transmitted through pores (not shown) in inner layer **164**, outer layer **166** or both. The embodiments shown in FIGS. **18-21** are merely exemplary, as it may be desirable to have preferential diffusion of the deliverable agent **168** through layer **164** or layer **166**. In addition, both layers **164** and **166** may be configured to allow a significant amount of diffusion of deliverable agent **168**, but with one of the two layers having a greater permeability to the deliverable agent **168** than the other layer. While inner layer **164** and layer **166** are shown as having only a single layer of material, it should be appreciated that each of layers **164** or **166** may include one or more layers to form a composite film of fluid-permeable PTFE, PTFE having low fluid permeability, PTFE having substantially no fluid permeability or any combination thereof. A more complete description of methods and devices for the delivery of a therapeutic agent can be found in copending and commonly owned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/769,532 (which published as US 20050171593 A1), filed Jan. 30, 2004 and entitled "Inflatable Porous Implants and Methods for Drug Delivery" to Whirley et al., the complete disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. A description of exemplary inflation medium materials can be found in copending and commonly owned U.S. patent application Ser. No.

11/097,467, filed Apr. 1, 2005 and entitled "A Non-Degradable, Low Swelling, Water Soluble, Radiopaque Hydrogel" to Askari et al., the complete disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

[0093] In the embodiment shown in FIG. **18**, outer layer **166** is permeable to fluids so as to allow the therapeutic agent **168**, which may be a liquid, to diffuse over time in the direction of arrow **169** through outer layer **166**. In such embodiments, inner layer **164** typically has a low or substantially no fluid permeability, and could therefore be considered a "barrier layer." Because the inner "barrier" layer **164** has low or substantially no fluid permeability and outer layer **166** is fluid-permeable, the therapeutic agent will preferentially diffuse from space **162** in the direction of arrow **169**. The use of one (or more) porous fluid-permeable outer PTFE layers and an inner layer **164** having low or substantially no fluid permeability provides for improved release of a therapeutic agent through liquid-permeable outer layer **166**. Varying the porosity or pore size across at least a portion of outer layer **166** may provide even more localized delivery of the therapeutic agent **168** through outer layer **166**.

[0094] In an alternative configuration shown in FIG. **19**, inner layer **164** may be substantially fluid-permeable to allow the therapeutic agent **168** to selectively diffuse in the direction of arrow **169** through inner layer **164** and into the lumen of the tubular structure (e.g., lumen **135**, **145** of FIGS. **15** and **16**). In such embodiments, outer layer **166** typically has no or substantially no fluid-permeability and acts as a "barrier layer." As such, the therapeutic agent will preferentially diffuse from space **162** in the direction of arrow **169**. The use of porous fluid-permeable PTFE layers and outer layer **166** having low or substantially no fluid permeability provides for improved release of a therapeutic agent into the inner lumen through fluid-permeable inner layer **164**. Varying the permeability and/or porosity or pore size across at least a portion of inner layer **164** may provide even more localized delivery of the therapeutic agent **168** through layer **164**.

[0095] As shown in FIG. **20**, if it is desired to prevent the inflation medium **167** from escaping from inflatable space **162**, both the inner layer **164** and outer layer **166** may comprise a "barrier" layer having low or substantially no fluid permeability. In such embodiments, the inner and outer layers **164** and **166** have low or substantially no fluid permeability. In such embodiments, inflation material **167** typically will not contain a therapeutic agent. Referring to FIG. **21**, the inflatable channel may be a substantially tubular channel **170** that is fused or otherwise adhered to layer **164** that defines an inner lumen of the graft. If delivery of a therapeutic agent **168** is desired, tubular channel **170** will be liquid-permeable and will allow diffusion of the therapeutic agent **168** through pores in tubular channel **170**. If however, it is desired to prevent the inflation fluid **167** from escaping from inflatable space **162**, then tubular channel **170** will act as a barrier layer and may comprise at least one layer of PTFE having low or substantially no fluid permeability.

[0096] Referring now to FIGS. **22** and **23**, the respective graft embodiments **150** and **180** shown include an inflatable channel **158** has portions with a circumferential configuration as opposed to the helical configuration of the inflatable channel **158** shown in FIG. **17**. The circumferential configuration of portions of the inflatable channel **158** may be particularly effective in providing the needed kink resistance for endovascular graft for effectively treating diseased body passageways such as a thoracic aortic aneurysm (TAA), abdominal aortic

aneurysm (AAA), in which highly angled and tortuous anatomies are frequently found. In alternative embodiments, other cuff and channel configurations are possible. Inflatable channel **158** may be configured circumferentially as shown in FIGS. **22** and **23**.

[0097] In addition to the substantially tubular grafts of FIG. **22**, bifurcated endovascular grafts as shown in FIG. **23**, are also contemplated. The bifurcated endovascular graft **180** may be utilized to repair a diseased lumen at or near a bifurcation within the vessel, such as, for example, in the case of an abdominal aortic aneurysm in which the aneurysm to be treated may extend into the anatomical bifurcation or even into one or both of the iliac arteries distal to the bifurcation. In the following discussion, the various features of the graft embodiments previously discussed maybe used as necessary in the bifurcated graft **80** embodiment unless specifically mentioned otherwise.

[0098] Graft **180** comprises a first bifurcated portion **182**, a second bifurcated portion **184** and main body portion **186**. The size and angular orientation of the bifurcated portions **182** and **184** may vary to accommodate graft delivery system requirements and various clinical demands. The size and angular orientation may vary even between portion **182** and **184**. For instance, each bifurcated portion or leg is shown in FIG. **23** to optionally have a different length. First and second bifurcated portions **182** and **184** are generally configured to have an outer inflated diameter that is compatible with the inner diameter of a patient's iliac arteries. First and second bifurcated portions **182** and **184** may also be formed in a curved shape to better accommodate curved and even tortuous anatomies in some applications. Together, main body portion **186** and first and second bifurcated portions **182** and **184** form a continuous bifurcated lumen, similar to the inner lumens of FIG. **22**, which is configured to confine a flow of fluid therethrough. A complete description of some desirable sizes and spacing of inflatable channels may be found in commonly owned, copending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/384,103 (which published as US 20040176836 A1), entitled "Kink-Resistant Endovascular Graft" and filed Mar. 6, 2003 to Kari et al., the complete disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

[0099] While not shown, it should be appreciated, that instead of circumferential channels and longitudinal channels, the bifurcated graft **180** may comprise a helical inflatable channel **158**, similar to that of the graft embodiment shown in FIG. **17** (or other channel geometries to achieve desired results), or a combination of helical and circumferential channels. A complete description of some embodiments of endovascular grafts that have helical and cylindrical channel configurations may be found in co-pending and commonly owned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/384,103 (which published as US 2004/0176836 A1). Other endovascular grafts that the liquid-impermeable PTFE film may be used with are described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,395,019 to Chobotov, U.S. Pat. No. 6,132,457 to Chobotov, U.S. Pat. No. 6,331,191 to Chobotov, and U.S. patent application Ser. Nos. 10/327,711 (which published as US 2003/0125797 A1), entitled "Advanced Endovascular Graft" to Chobotov et al. and filed Dec. 20, 2002, Ser. No. 10/168,053, the complete disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0100] As can be appreciated, the inflatable portions of the graft **180** optionally may be configured to have varying levels of fluid permeability and/or porosity, either within or between particular cuffs, channels or cuff/channel segments, so as to

provide for controlled drug delivery, programmed drug delivery or both, into the vessel wall or lumen of the graft via elution of the agent from pores in the layers. For example, any desired portion of the graft **180** may include PTFE layers having low or substantially no fluid permeability. Such a configuration would be useful in applications in which the drug delivery rate and other properties of the graft or stent-graft (e.g. mechanical properties) may be selected for the particular clinical needs and indication that is contemplated for that device. In addition, the fluid permeability and/or porosity may be uniform within a particular cuff or channel but different between any given channel and/or cuffs. In addition to improved drug delivery, the variable porosity of the outer surface of the graft may also be beneficial for promoting tissue in-growth into the graft. It may be possible to make portions of the graft that are in direct contact with the body lumen to have a higher porosity and/or larger pore size so as to promote tissue in-growth. In particular, tissue in-growth may be beneficial adjacent to the proximal and distal ends of the graft.

[0101] With regard to the above detailed description, like reference numerals used therein refer to like elements that may have the same or similar dimensions, materials and configurations. While particular forms of embodiments have been illustrated and described, it will be apparent that various modifications can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the embodiments of the invention. Accordingly, it is not intended that the invention be limited by the forgoing detailed description.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of processing PTFE, comprising: providing a layer of PTFE;
 - selectively applying a stretching agent to at least one lateral zone of the layer of PTFE in a predetermined pattern; and
 - stretching the layer of PTFE.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein the layer of PTFE is stretched while the at least one lateral zone is wet with the stretching agent.
3. The method of claim 1 wherein stretching the layer of PTFE comprises stretching the layer of PTFE by a stretch ratio of about 2:1 to about 20:1.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein the stretching of the layer of PTFE comprises stretching in a machine direction.
5. The method of claim 1 wherein the stretching of the layer comprises stretching the layer in a direction transverse to the machine direction.
6. The method of claim 1 further comprising calendaring the stretched layer of PTFE to compress and densify the PTFE layer.
7. The method of claim 1 wherein the stretching agent comprises an isoparaffin.
8. The method of claim 1 wherein the stretching agent is selected from the group consisting of naphtha, mineral sprits, alcohol, MEK, toluene and alcohol.
9. The method of claim 1 wherein the stretching agent content of the layer of PTFE prior to selective application of the stretching agent is about 0 percent by weight to about 22 percent by weight.
10. The method of claim 1 further comprising stretching the stretched layer of PTFE a second time.
11. A method of processing PTFE, comprising:
 - providing a layer of PTFE having a stretching agent content level;

selectively removing stretching agent from at least one lateral zone of the portion of the layer of PTFE in a predetermined pattern; and stretching the layer of PTFE.

12. The method of claim 11 wherein the layer of PTFE is stretched while at least a portion of the layer of PTFE is wet with stretching agent.

13. The method of claim 11 wherein stretching the layer of PTFE comprises stretching the layer of PTFE by a stretch ratio of about 2:1 to about 20:1.

14. The method of claim 11 wherein the stretching of the layer of PTFE comprises stretching in a machine direction.

15. The method of claim 11 wherein the stretching of the layer comprises stretching the layer in a direction transverse to the machine direction.

16. The method of claim 11 further comprising calendaring the stretched layer of PTFE to compress and densify the PTFE layer.

17. The method of claim 11 wherein the stretching agent comprises an isoparaffin.

18. The method of claim 11 wherein the stretching agent is selected from the group consisting of naphtha, mineral sprits, alcohol, MEK, toluene and alcohol.

19. The method of claim 11 further comprising applying stretching agent to the layer of PTFE prior to selective removal of the stretching agent.

20. The method of claim 19 wherein the stretching agent content of the layer of PTFE prior to application of the stretching agent is about 3 percent by weight to about 22 percent by weight.

21. The method of claim 19 further comprising spreading the stretching agent after application to the layer of PTFE with a skimming member disposed adjacent the layer of PTFE.

22. The method of claim 11 further comprising stretching the stretched layer of PTFE a second time.

23. A method of processing PTFE, comprising:
 providing a layer of PTFE;
 applying a stretching agent to at least one lateral zone of a surface of the layer in a predetermined pattern until the lateral zone is saturated with the stretching agent; and stretching the layer of PTFE while lateral zone of the layer of PTFE is saturated with the stretching agent.

24. The method of claim 23 further comprising stretching the stretched layer of PTFE a second time.

25. A PTFE layer comprising a layer made by providing a layer of PTFE;
 selectively applying a stretching agent to at least one lateral zone of the layer of PTFE in a predetermined pattern; and stretching the layer of PTFE.

26. A PTFE layer comprising a layer made by providing a layer of PTFE having a stretching agent content level; selectively removing stretching agent from at least one lateral zone of the portion of the layer of PTFE in a predetermined pattern; and stretching the layer of PTFE.

27. A PTFE layer comprising a layer made by providing a layer of PTFE;
 applying a stretching agent to at least one lateral zone of a surface of the layer in a predetermined pattern until the lateral zone is saturated with the stretching agent; and stretching the layer of PTFE while lateral zone of the layer of PTFE is saturated with the stretching agent.

28. A multi-layered vascular graft comprising:
 a first tubular body having an outer surface and an inner surface that defines an inner lumen of the vascular graft; and
 a second tubular body having an outer surface and an inner surface coupled to the outer surface of the first tubular body,
 wherein at least one of the first tubular body and the second tubular body comprises a PTFE layer having a first lateral zone with a substantially low porosity, a low fluid permeability and no discernable node and fibril microstructure, and a second lateral zone which is fluid-permeable and has substantial node and fibril microstructure.

29. A tubular structure comprising a layer of PTFE having a first lateral zone which is fluid-permeable and which has substantial node and fibril microstructure and a second lateral zone with a closed cell microstructure having high density regions whose grain boundaries are directly interconnected to grain boundaries of adjacent high density regions and having no discernable node and fibril microstructure.

30. An endovascular graft comprising a PTFE layer having a first lateral zone with a liquid-permeable, expanded PTFE layer adjacent a second lateral zone having (a) a closed cell microstructure having high density regions whose grain boundaries are directly interconnected to grain boundaries of adjacent high density regions and (b) substantially no node and fibril microstructure.

31. The endovascular graft of claim 30 wherein the endovascular graft comprises an inflatable endovascular graft having at least one inflatable channel and wherein the second lateral zone bounds at least a portion of the inflatable channel.

32. A thin, continuous PTFE layer, comprising:
 a first lateral zone with a substantially low porosity, a low fluid permeability, no discernable node and fibril structure, and a high degree of limpness and suppleness to allow mechanical manipulation or strain of the PTFE layer without significant recoil or spring back; and
 a second lateral zone which is fluid-permeable and has a substantial node and fibril microstructure.

33. A method of processing a layer of PTFE, comprising:
 providing a layer of PTFE;
 stretching the layer of PTFE; and
 applying a stretching agent to the PTFE layer during the stretching process.

34. The method of claim 33 wherein the formation of a discernable node and fibril microstructure is created during the stretching process prior to application of the stretching agent to the PTFE layer.

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