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Optimising UHMWPE Braid Performance Through Structural Engineering

Executive Summary

This development programme focused on enhancing the mechanical performance of existing UHMWPE braided construction used in a load-bearing medical textile assembly.

The objective was to increase tensile strength and reduce elongation under load while maintaining compatibility with the existing product architecture, assembly process, and end-use application.

Rather than redesigning the braid, the programme optimised material distribution, braid structure, and fibre interaction within the established platform. The result was an improved braid architecture that delivered enhanced mechanical performance while preserving manufacturing compatibility and scalability.

The Challenge

The existing coreless UHMWPE braid had demonstrated reliable performance in service but required further optimisation to meet increasing mechanical demands.

The challenge was to improve load-bearing performance without changing the overall braid architecture or disrupting established manufacturing and assembly processes.

Key engineering challenges included:

- Increasing tensile strength without increasing braid diameter or structural bulk
- Reducing elongation while maintaining flexibility and handling performance
- Improving load transfer between fibres within a coreless construction
- Maintaining uniform load distribution throughout the braid
- Preserving compatibility with existing assembly and manufacturing processes
- Achieving repeatable improvements without introducing process complexity

Engineering Objectives

The programme was designed to:

- Increase tensile strength within the existing braid architecture
- Reduce elongation under load
- Maintain a coreless braid construction
- Optimise fibre interaction through material distribution and twist control
- Preserve dimensional consistency and handling characteristics
- Establish a repeatable manufacturing process suitable for production

Development Approach

Structural Optimisation

Development focused on improving mechanical performance through refinement of the existing braid architecture rather than introducing a new design.

Key engineering activities included:

- Maintaining the established coreless braid construction
- Optimising carrier material distribution
- Evaluating both UHMWPE-only and hybrid braid configurations
- Applying controlled twist levels to improve fibre interaction and load transfer

Two alternative braid constructions were developed and compared to assess how

structural variation influenced tensile behaviour and elongation.

Engineering Strategy

Rather than increasing material content, the programme concentrated on improving how fibres interacted within the braid structure.

Optimisation of material distribution and twist promoted more efficient load sharing between fibres, improving mechanical response while maintaining compatibility with existing production methods.

Validation & Performance Assessment

Baseline and optimised braid constructions were evaluated using consistent mechanical and dimensional assessment methods.

Testing included:

- Tensile strength evaluation
- Elongation under load
- Dimensional consistency
- Structural uniformity
- Manufacturing stability across production runs

The assessment confirmed that structural optimisation delivered measurable improvements in mechanical performance while maintaining dimensional integrity and manufacturing consistency.

Process Control & Repeatability

Consistent manufacturing performance was achieved through careful control of critical process parameters.

Key controls included:

- Balanced yarn tension across all carriers
- Standardised twist application
- Controlled material distribution within each braid configuration
- Defined inspection and measurement procedures
- Consistent production conditions throughout evaluation trials

These controls ensured meaningful comparison between braid variants and demonstrated that the optimised construction could be manufactured repeatable at production scale.

Engineering Outcome

The programme demonstrated that significant improvements in mechanical performance could be achieved through structural optimisation without fundamentally redesigning the braid.

Key engineering outcomes included:

- Increased tensile performance within the existing architecture
- Reduced elongation under load
- Improved fibre interaction and load sharing
- Preservation of existing assembly compatibility
- Establishment of a scalable and repeatable manufacturing process

The project reinforced the principle that braid architecture can be engineered to enhance performance while maintaining established manufacturing platforms and product designs.

Application Relevance

The engineering principles demonstrated in this programme are directly applicable to high-strength braided medical textiles where mechanical reliability and controlled elongation are critical.

Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine

Braided fixation systems for ligament reconstruction, tendon repair, and rotator cuff repair requiring high tensile strength and minimal elongation.

Minimally Invasive Surgical Devices

Braided components used in arthroscopic repair systems, suture-based fixation devices, and tensioning mechanisms where predictable mechanical performance is essential.

Advanced Implantable Textile Systems

Load-bearing reinforcement structures and textile implant components requiring controlled mechanical behaviour and log-term structural stability.

Key Takeaways

- Existing braid platforms can be enhanced through structural optimisation rather than complete redesign.
- Material distribution and fibre interaction have a significant influence on tensile performance and elongation.
- Controlled twist and braid architecture improve load sharing within coreless constructions.
- Mechanical performance can be increased while preserving manufacturing compatibility.
- Structural optimisation provides a scalable pathway for enhancing existing medical textile products.

"Mechanical performance was enhanced through structural optimisation of an existing UHMWPE braid, delivering increased strength and reduced elongation without redesigning the product platforms."

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2755 Canyon Boulevard, 1st Floor
Boulder, CO 80302