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THE SCOTSMAN

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Strange world: Really smart clothes

A NEW kind of stretchy silicon circuit could open the door to "smart" surgical gloves, interactive clothing and flexible devices that wrap around mechanical parts, such as aircraft wings.

A NEW kind of stretchy silicon circuit could open the door to "smart" surgical gloves, interactive clothing and flexible devices that wrap around mechanical parts, such as aircraft wings.

The stretchable integrated circuit can be moulded around complex shapes and operate while being compressed, folded or pulled apart with no reduction in performance.

It would be ideal for wearable medical monitors that can read heart rate and other vital signs, or surgical gloves fitted with sensors, say scientists.

Professor John Rogers, a member of the development team at the University of Illinois in Champaign, US, said: "The notion that silicon cannot be used in such applications because it is intrinsically brittle and rigid has been tossed out the window.

"Through carefully optimised mechanical layouts and structural configurations, we can use silicon in integrated circuits that are fully foldable and stretchable."

In December 2005, Prof Rogers and his team reported the development of a form of "wavy" single-crystal silicon that could stretch in one direction.

Now, working with colleagues in the US and Singapore, the group has extended the concept to two dimensions.

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