

Suction pump with air release valve

Technical field

5 The invention relates to a suction pump with an air release valve according to the preamble of patent claim 1.

Prior art

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Suction pumps are known for a wide variety of applications. However, they can preferably be used in breast pump devices for pumping off breast milk, or as drainage pumps for suctioning off body fluids.

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There are suction pumps in closed systems which at all times move the same air within the pump chamber. However, open pump systems are also known with an air release valve which can be opened cyclically via an
20 electromagnet.

The requirements placed on these suction pumps, in particular when they are used as breast pumps, are quite high. They should be as powerful as possible
25 but, at the same time, relatively small. Particularly in their use as breast pumps, they should be able to operate with minimum maintenance and should be easy to clean.

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Summary of the invention

It is an object of the invention to create a suction pump which can be put together as easily as possible.

35 This object is achieved by a suction pump having the features of patent claim 1.

The suction pump according to the invention has an air release valve with an air release membrane, and this

air release membrane and a vacuum membrane used to generate the vacuum are designed integrally in the form of a common membrane plate.

- 5 Arranging the air release valve and the vacuum membrane on the same plate means that these elements are less expensive to produce and are easier to assemble.

In a preferred embodiment, the pump comprises an upper
10 housing part, a middle housing part and a lower housing part, with a membrane plate and a valve plate being arranged between the housing parts. This division means that several elements can be formed on the same structural part. In particular, the vacuum membrane
15 needed to generate the underpressure, and the air release membrane needed to rapidly cancel the underpressure, can be formed integrally on the same structural part. Control flaps and valve flaps can also be formed integrally on a common structural part.
20 Electric motor and electromagnet can be secured in the same housing part. By dividing the pump into several levels, preferably five levels, the number of individual parts can be reduced to a minimum without having to give up the complexity of the pump assembly.
25 This not only reduces the outer dimensions of the pump assembly, but also minimizes the production and assembly costs.

A further advantage of this modular construction with
30 several levels is that the pump can be cleaned by simple flushing, without having to be dismantled into its individual parts. By virtue of the exhaust leading to the outside, no sponge is needed. Such sponges are used in the prior art to absorb milk that has been
35 sucked into the pump and also to attenuate noise. However, they take up space in the pump and tend to give rise to unpleasant odor.

A preferred embodiment and a preferred method for actuating a suction pump permit the smallest possible design of the pump yet at the same time allow short pump cycles.

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In the this preferred method, an air release body, which closes an air release opening of the air release valve, is at first only partially lifted. In this way, a smaller force is needed than if the whole air release
10 opening is freed in a single step.

The means for actuating, in particular for lifting, the air release body can therefore be less powerful and can thus be made smaller. If an electromagnet is used as
15 such a means, a relatively low-power type can be used. The reason is that, when pulling up or lifting the air release body, the electromagnet can at first apply less force than it does at the end of the movement. This initially available lower force, however, is sufficient
20 to free a relatively small opening. It is therefore possible to use a relatively small and thus also inexpensive electromagnet. Moreover, the air release opening can be made relatively large. This ensures a rapid cancellation of the underpressure and, therefore,
25 the desired functionality of the pump.

The pump easily reaches 120 cycles per minute. However, it can also operate optimally at a cycle rate of 50-72 cycles per minute. The first cycle rate is particularly
30 suitable for stimulation, the second one for expression of breast milk.

In a preferred variant of the above mentioned method, only an edge area of the air release body is at first
35 removed from the air release opening. A minimal amount of force is needed if this edge area coincides with a corner of the air release body.

The air release body is the membrane. The lifting of its edge area is made easier if the lifted edge area is less thick than the rest of the membrane. The air release opening is preferably polygonal, in particular 5 square or triangular. The membrane too is preferably polygonal, preferably square or triangular.

To permit easier lifting of the membrane, a connecting pin can be secured to it or integrally formed on it, 10 and this connecting pin is connected to an armature of the lifting magnet. This connecting pin is preferably situated in the edge area of the membrane that covers the air release opening. However, the membrane can also be designed with a raised flange, in which case the 15 connecting pin is not arranged over the air release opening but instead on this raised flange.

If the connecting pin is designed so as to be movable relative to the membrane, it is possible to overcome 20 any production-related or assembly-related tolerances. Errors in the angle of the electromagnet can also be compensated. Good results were achieved using a connecting pin which is formed integrally on an air release membrane made of silicone and which, by means 25 of suitable thickening of the material, has sufficient stiffness. It can be formed thereon in a hinged manner. However, in a simple embodiment, the elasticity of the material of the connecting pin suffices to make it movable about its point of attachment.

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The above mentioned embodiment with the air release membrane that can be actuated in an edge area, has the advantage that it ensures leaktightness and thus, particularly when used in a breast pump, ensures there 35 is no leakage of the pumped-off milk.

A further advantage of the abovementioned embodiments, particularly as regards the use of the membrane, is

that no springs are needed, and the number of individual parts required can therefore be reduced. Since no spring has to be fitted, the work involved in assembling the pump is also reduced.

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In a preferred embodiment the suction pump comprises a safety valve, wherein the pump cannot be inactivated by liquid, in particular milk, that has been sucked into
10 the pump and has accumulated there.

This suction pump has a safety valve with a first stage which opens at a first underpressure, and with a second stage which opens at a second underpressure. The first
15 underpressure is quantitatively lower than the second.

This two-stage design of the safety valve ensures that milk cannot get as far as the second stage. Since the first stage opens even in the event of a very slight
20 deviation from the ideal underpressure, it will still open, in the event of clogging, when the underpressure is at a higher level, that is to say in an emergency situation. The second valve prevents the entire safety valve from opening at too small a deviation, but it
25 still opens reliably in an emergency situation.

The suction pump according to the invention can therefore reduce the vacuum in a relatively short time and without too much force. The pump according to the
30 invention is suitable for a wide variety of applications. It is suitable in particular as a breast pump for suctioning off breast milk and as a drainage pump for suctioning off body fluids. The pump assembly according to the invention is suitable in particular
35 for use in a portable breast pump, as is described in particular in still to be published PCT/CH 2004/000061.

Further advantageous embodiments are set forth in the

attached patent claims.

Brief description of the drawings

5 The subject matter of the invention is explained below on the basis of preferred illustrative embodiments depicted in the attached drawings, in which:

10 Figure 1 shows a perspective view of the suction pump according to the invention without outer housing;

15 Figure 2 shows a view of the suction pump according to Figure 1 from below;

Figure 3 shows a longitudinal section through the suction pump according to Figure 1;

20 Figure 4 shows an exploded view of the suction pump according to Figure 1;

25 Figure 5 shows a perspective view of a lower housing part of the suction pump according to Figure 1;

Figure 6 shows a view of a membrane plate of the suction pump according to Figure 1 from above;

30 Figure 7 shows a longitudinal section through the membrane plate according to Figure 6;

35 Figure 8 shows an enlarged detail of the membrane plate according to Figure 7;

Figure 9 shows a view into a part of the upper housing part from above;

Figure 10 shows a view of a membrane plate of the suction pump according to a second embodiment from above;

5 Figure 11 shows a longitudinal section through the membrane plate according to Figure 10 and

Figure 12 shows an enlarged detail of the membrane plate according to Figure 11.

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Embodiments of the invention

Figure 1 shows a suction pump according to the invention, such as is suitable in particular for a breast pump device for pumping off human breast milk. However, the pump is also suitable for other applications, for example for drainage pumps for suctioning off body fluids.

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Only the actual pump assembly is shown. This assembly is usually arranged in an outer housing. The figure does not show this outer housing and the electronics needed for actuating the pump, or any energy storage means, for example an accumulator or battery.

The pump has an extremely compact structure. One of its largest elements is an electric motor 1. It also has an upper housing part 2, a middle housing part 4 and a lower housing part 6, which can be plugged together. An attachment part 7 is also provided which is a component part of these housing parts or, as is the case here, is plugged onto them.

35 On the attachment part 7, there is at least one breast shield attachment piece 70 on which a connecting tube to a breast shield can be plugged. The attachment part 7 also comprises an exhaust 71. This exhaust 71 also

leads out of the outer housing. An air release channel 72, also protruding from the outer housing, and spacer elements 73 are also present. The spacer elements 73 brace the pump assembly in relation to an outer housing 5 in such a way that vibrations cannot be transmitted and a sufficient sound insulation is ensured.

It will be seen from Figure 2 how the individual attachments 70, 71, 72 are connected via individual 10 channels to the individual areas of the pump.

The longitudinal section shown in Figure 3 through the pump, now without motor 1, shows that the pump, despite its compact design, is divided into three clearly 15 distinguishable function areas: a pump unit P, an air release unit V and, arranged between these, a safety unit S. The structure of the pump can best be seen from an overview of Figures 3 and 4.

20 The pump unit P comprises a vacuum membrane 31 and inlet and outlet control flaps 51, 52 which, together with inlet and outlet openings 62, 63 and with a pump chamber opening 43', create a connection between a pump chamber 43 and a vacuum channel 69. The vacuum membrane 25 31 is connected to a drive shaft 10 of the electric motor 1 via a connecting rod 11, coupling piece 12, for example a ball bearing, and eccentric 13 and, by means of this motor 1, it can be lifted and lowered according to a predetermined rhythm or pump curve or according to 30 a rhythm or pump curve that can be freely selected via a control system.

The air release unit V comprises an air release valve with an air release membrane 32, and an air release 35 opening which can be closed tightly by the latter and is in the form of an air release membrane seat 44. The chamber 44' surrounding the air release membrane seat 44 is connected via an air release attachment 45 to the

air release channel 72. The air release membrane seat 44 is open at the bottom, that is to say on the side directed away from the air release membrane 32, and adjoins a first air release opening 54 of the valve plate 5 and a second air release opening 67 of the lower housing part 6. This second air release opening 67 is connected via the vacuum channel 69 to a safety valve chamber 68 and to the inlet opening 62.

10 The air release membrane 32 is connected via a connecting pin 33 to an armature 80 of a lifting magnet or electromagnet 8. The electromagnet 8 lifts the air release membrane 32 and thus frees the air release membrane seat 44. By this means, air passes through the
15 air release channel 72 and through the first and second air release openings 54, 67 into the vacuum channel 69, and the underpressure in the latter is reduced. This lifting and lowering of the air release membrane 32 also takes place according to a predetermined function
20 or according to a function that can be freely selected via a control system, and which function is coordinated with the movement of the vacuum membrane 31. The movements of the vacuum membrane 31 and of the air release membrane 32 are preferably coordinated in such
25 a way that a pump curve is obtained which is as described in WO 01/47577 and which is adapted to the needs of mother and child or imitates the natural sucking rhythm of a baby. The assembly functions in all positions, that is to say, for example, when it is
30 lying or standing on a table or being carried. The vacuum generated is largely independent of how the assembly is spatially arranged.

The safety unit S comprises a safety valve. In the
35 event of a malfunction or failure of the control electronics that coordinate the movement of the vacuum membrane 31 and of the air release membrane 32, this safety valve ensures that the level of the

underpressure in the pump does not become too great and injure the mother's breast.

According to the invention, the safety unit S is
5 designed with two stages. The first stage consists of a first safety membrane 55 and of a semispherical safety valve closure 46 which has a small lateral opening 46' and which presses on the first safety membrane 55. This first stage opens even at a low underpressure of about
10 120 mmHg.

The second stage comprises a second safety membrane 35 which is closed by means of an adjusting screw 9. Its limit value, at which it opens, can be modified by
15 adjustment of the adjusting screw 9. According to the invention, it opens at a higher underpressure than the first stage, for example at about 290 mmHg.

If milk or another suctioned fluid accidentally gets
20 into the pump, it settles in the area of the first stage and cannot pass through to the second stage via the chamber lying in between. At the very most, therefore, it can cover the first safety membrane 55. In this covered state, the latter possibly no longer
25 opens at the preset value, but it always opens early enough to permit release. The second membrane always opens only when the limit value is actually exceeded and the pump has to be relieved. Since the second stage cannot be soiled, it always opens reliably.

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The individual parts of the pump can best be seen in Figure 4. This exploded view shows that the pump is divided into several levels I, II, III, IV and V, where parts of the pump unit P, of the safety unit S and of
35 the air release unit V are arranged on common levels.

A first level I, which usually, but not necessarily, forms the uppermost level in the operating position,

comprises the upper housing part 2, the aforementioned motor 1, and the electromagnet 8. The motor 1 is secured by fastening screws 21 onto a motor plate 20 of the upper housing part 2. The motor can be screwed onto
5 the motor plate 20 and can likewise be plugged onto the pump assembly. The housing part 2 comprises a connecting rod chamber 23 which is used to receive the connecting rod 11, the ball bearing 12 connected thereto, and an eccentric with counterweight 13. The
10 counterweight 13 does not necessarily have to be present. The upper housing part 2 also comprises a magnet chamber 24 which is separate from the connecting rod chamber 23 and in which the electromagnet 8 is secured. At its lower end, the upper housing part 2 has
15 upper locking clips 22 which protrude downward.

The adjusting screw 9 for the second stage of the safety valve is also arranged adjustably in the upper housing part 2.

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The second level II is defined by a membrane plate 3 which extends at least approximately across the whole base surface of the upper housing part 2 and thus of the pump assembly. The membrane plate 3 is made of a
25 flexible material, in particular silicone, and is relatively thin. It has centering holes 30 in its edge areas, and upper and lower sealing lips 34, 34', 34'' which ensure an airtight and liquid-tight connection to the upper housing part 2 and middle housing part 4,
30 respectively. The lower sealing lips can be seen in Figure 7. The membrane plate 3 comprises the air release membrane 32, which is designed in the shape of a triangle. As can be seen in Figure 6, the air release membrane 32 has a triangular basic shape. This triangle
35 is divided into two subsidiary areas, where a first subsidiary area 32' again forms a triangle, and the second subsidiary area 32'' is formed by the remaining part of the membrane and thus has a trapezoid shape. A

first corner of the first subsidiary area 32' coincides with a corner of the air release membrane 32. An opposite side of the first subsidiary area 32' extends parallel to an opposite side of the air release
5 membrane 32, and the two other sides of the triangle of the first subsidiary area 32' extend congruently with respect to the sides of the triangle of the air release membrane 32. The triangular first subsidiary area 32' is less thick than the second subsidiary area 32'', as
10 can be seen in Figures 7 and 8.

The connecting pin 33 is formed integrally on the free corner of the first subsidiary area 32'. As can also be seen from Figures 7 and 8, it projects upward at least
15 approximately perpendicular to the plane of the membrane and is fixedly connected to the armature 80. The air release membrane 32 is surrounded by a first sealing lip 34.

20 The membrane plate 3 further comprises the vacuum membrane 31, which is connected to the connecting rod 11. The connecting rod 11 can be formed integrally on the vacuum membrane 31 by material thickening and can be composed of a two-component material. It can also be
25 produced separately, however, and be connected to the membrane 31 during assembly. The vacuum membrane is sealed off from the upper and middle housing parts 2, 4 by means of a second sealing lip 34'.

30 The membrane plate 3 further comprises the second membrane 35 of the safety valve. The latter, as can best be seen in Figure 7, has a v-shaped opening that widens toward the bottom and is sealed off from the upper and middle housing parts 2, 4 by means of a third
35 sealing lip 34'' that surrounds it.

The third level III is formed by the middle housing part 4. Like the upper and lower housing parts 2, 6, it

is preferably made of a solid plastic material, for example POM (polyoxymethylene). The middle housing part 4 is panel-shaped and has a plane upper face and a plane lower face. On its side faces, it is provided with upwardly and downwardly directed catches 40, 41, respectively, the upper catches 40 engaging into the upper locking clips 22 of the upper housing part 2, and the lower catches 41 engaging into lower locking clips 60 of the lower housing part 6. Centering holes 42 are also present which are in alignment with the centering holes 30 of the membrane plate 3.

Two recesses, closed at the bottom and with small lateral connecting openings, are present in the middle housing part 4. One of these recesses forms the vacuum membrane seat 43 for the vacuum membrane and thus defines the pump chamber. A second of these recesses forms a safety closure 46 of the first safety stage. The chamber 44', with the membrane seat 44 arranged therein for the air release membrane 32, is also present in the middle housing part 4. This seat 44 has a triangular shape in this example. The chamber 44' is a recessed, h-shaped trough, the latter being connected to the air release attachment 45.

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The fourth level IV in turn comprises a flexible plate, preferably of silicone. It is formed by a valve plate 5. This too has centering holes 50, at least one pair of these centering holes 50 being in alignment with the centering holes of the middle housing part 4 and of the membrane plate 3.

The valve plate 5 comprises a first control flap 51, which forms an inlet for the vacuum chamber. It further comprises a second control flap 52, which forms an outlet for the vacuum chamber. Leading away from the second control flap 52, there is a double sealing lip 53 which surrounds an upwardly open connecting channel

64 arranged in the lower housing part 6 and seals this connecting channel 64 at the top.

The first membrane 55 of the safety valve is also
5 formed integrally in the valve plate 5. The latter also
comprises the first air release opening 54, which
ensures a connection between the air release membrane
seat 44 and a second air release opening 67, which is
arranged in the lower housing part 6. The individual
10 elements of the valve plate 5 are in turn provided with
upper and lower sealing lips to seal them relative to
the middle and lower housing parts 4, 6. All the
elements of the valve plate 5 are preferably produced
integrally with the latter.

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The fifth level V comprises the lower housing part 6
and the attachment part 7. These two parts can be
formed by a single common part, or, as is shown here,
they can be coupled to one another by plug connections.

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The lower housing part 6 is shown in Figure 4, and in
another perspective view in Figure 5. It also has a
plate-shaped design, its underside forming the base of
the pump assembly. The lower locking clips 60 project
25 upward at the sides, such that the lower catches 41 of
the middle housing part 4 can lock into them. Centering
pins 61 are also present which also project upward and
can be guided through the centering holes 30, 42, 50 of
the membrane plate 3, of the middle housing part 4 and
30 of the valve plate 5. These centering pins and
centering holes make it easier to stack the individual
levels on one another and thus permit rapid assembly.

The lower housing part 6 further comprises a first
35 circular recess with central elevation, which forms an
inlet opening 62. A second circular recess forms an
outlet opening 63. This inlet opening 62 is connected
to the vacuum channel 69 extending in the inside of the

lower housing part 6. This channel 69 first passes through the safety valve opening 68 which is likewise designed as a trough and over which the safety membrane 55 of the first stage is arranged.

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The connecting channel 64, open at the top and sealed off by the sealing lip 53, extends in the lower housing part 6 and opens into the outlet opening 63. This connecting channel 64 is connected to the second air
10 release opening 67 present in the lower housing part 6.

As can be seen in Figure 5, the connecting channel 64 ends in an exhaust attachment 66 which can be plugged into the exhaust 71. The second air release opening 67
15 leads to a breast shield attachment part 65, which is connected to the breast shield attachment piece 70.

This construction permits simple cleaning of the pump. If milk or another suctioned liquid gets into the pump,
20 the latter can simply be flushed with water or air, the cleaning medium being pressed or blown in through the breast pump attachment piece 70 and leaving the pump again by way of the air release channel 72 and the exhaust 71.

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Figure 9 shows a partial view from above into the upper housing part 2. As can be seen here, the adjusting screw 9 of the safety valve S is designed with a round cross section but is screwed into a square thread
30 opening 25. This means that a sufficient passage of air is at all times ensured.

Figures 10 to 12 show a second embodiment. This embodiment differs from the one described above in the
35 area of the air release valve. The other parts are of the same design and are therefore not described again here. In this example, the air release membrane 32 is not triangular, but square. However, it can also be

hexagonal or octagonal or of any desired polygonal shape. It has been found in practice, however, that the square shape closes and opens more reliably compared to the triangular shape. The air release membrane is once again divided into thick and thin subsidiary areas 32', 32'', the connecting pin 33 being arranged on the thin subsidiary area 32'. The two subsidiary areas 32', 32'' are also substantially square, the connecting pin 33 being arranged on a long side of the thin subsidiary area 32' directed away from the thick subsidiary area 32''. It is now no longer secured in a corner, but approximately midway along this long side, as can be seen in Figure 10. It has also been found that the functionality is better ensured if the connecting pin 33 is integrally formed on the side wall 44'' of the chamber 44', as is shown in Figure 12. However, the opening lying below this, that is to say the air release membrane seat 44, is preferably triangular as before. In this case, the connecting pin 33 is preferably arranged exactly over the corner of the triangular hole 44.

The suction pump according to the invention therefore affords several advantages. It provides wide-ranging functionality within a very small space and can also be produced inexpensively and is easy to assemble.

The disclosure of this application comprises also:

1. A method for operating a suction pump, in particular a membrane pump for generating a vacuum, the suction pump having an air release valve with an air release body (32) which frees an air release opening (44, 54, 67) at cyclical time intervals and closes it sealingly again, characterized in that the air release body (32) is lifted in such a way that it at first only partially frees the air release opening (44, 54,

67).

2. The method as mentioned in above item 1, in which the air release body (32) is at first removed from the air release opening (44, 54, 67) at an edge area.
3. The method as mentioned in above item 2, in which the air release body (32) is at first removed at a corner of the air release opening (44, 54, 67).
4. The method as mentioned in above item 1, in which a first part of the air release body (32) is at first lifted in order to free a first air release channel, and a second part of the air release body (32) is then lifted in order to free a second air release channel, the second air release channel having a greater diameter than the first air release channel, and the two channels being connected to one another.
5. A suction pump, in particular a membrane pump for generating a vacuum, with an air release valve, the air release valve having an air release opening (44, 54, 67), an air release body (32) which can close the air release opening (44, 54, 67) sealingly, and an actuating means (8) for actuating the air release body (32), characterized in that the air release body (32) can be actuated in such a way that, upon opening of the valve, it at first frees only a partial area of the air release opening (44, 54, 67) and thereafter frees a larger partial area or the entire air release opening (44, 54, 67).
6. The suction pump as mentioned in above item 5, in which the air release body is an air release membrane (32), and in which the air release

membrane (32) has an edge area (32') at which it can at first be removed from the air release opening (44, 54, 67) upon opening of the valve.

- 5 7. The suction pump as mentioned in above item 6, in which the actuating means (8) is a lifting magnet, and the air release membrane (32) is connected to an armature (11) of the lifting magnet (8) via a connecting pin (33), and the connecting pin (33)
10 is connected to the air release membrane (32) at this edge area thereof.
8. The suction pump as mentioned in above item 7, in which the connecting pin is arranged over a corner
15 of the air release opening.
9. The suction pump as mentioned in above item 7, in which the connecting pin (33) is formed integrally on the air release membrane (32).
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10. The suction pump as mentioned in one of above items 7 through 9, in which the connecting pin (33) is arranged approximately perpendicular to the air release membrane (32).
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11. The suction pump as mentioned in one of above items 6 through 10, in which the air release membrane (32) is made of a plastic, in particular of silicone.
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12. The suction pump as mentioned in one of above items 6 through 11, in which the air release membrane (32) has at least one corner, and the edge area (32') comprises at least one of the at
35 least one corner.
13. The suction pump as mentioned in one of above items 6 through 12, in which the air release

membrane (32) has a polygonal basic shape, in particular a square or triangular basic shape.

- 5 14. The suction pump as mentioned in one of above items 6 through 13, in which the air release membrane (32) has a first partial area (32') with a lesser thickness and a second partial area (32'') with a greater thickness, and in which the edge area is arranged in the first partial area
10 (32').
- 15 15. The suction pump as mentioned in above items 13 and 14, in which the air release membrane (32) has a square basic shape, in which the two partial areas (32', 32'') each have a square basic shape, and in which the connecting pin (33) is arranged
20 on a long side of the thinner partial area (32') directed away from the thicker partial area (32'').
- 25 16. The suction pump as mentioned in above item 15, in which the long side has a center, and in which the connecting pin (33) is arranged in the area of this center on the thin partial area (32').
- 30 17. The suction pump as mentioned in one of above items 5 through 16, in which the air release opening (44, 54, 67) has a polygonal basic shape, in particular a square or triangular basic shape.
18. The suction pump as mentioned in one of above items 6 through 17, in which the air release membrane (32) is substantially plane.
- 35 19. The suction pump with an air release valve, in particular with an air release valve as mentioned in one of above items 6 through 18, in which the air release valve has an air release membrane

(32), and in which this air release membrane (32) and a vacuum membrane (31) used to generate the vacuum are designed integrally in the form of a common membrane plate (3).

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20. The suction pump as mentioned in above item 19, in which a part of this membrane plate (3) is designed as a safety membrane (35) of a safety valve.

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21. The suction pump as mentioned in either of above items 15 and 20, in which the pump comprises an upper housing part (2) which receives a lifting magnet (8) for actuating the air release membrane (32) and receives an electric motor (1) for actuating the vacuum membrane (31), a middle housing part (4) with an air release membrane seat (44) which is provided for the air release membrane (32) and which surrounds an air release opening, and with a vacuum membrane seat (43) for the vacuum membrane (31), and a lower housing part (6) for forming a vacuum channel (69) between air release opening (44, 54, 67) and an inlet opening (62, 51, 43') of the vacuum membrane seat (43), the membrane plate (3) being arranged between the upper and middle housing parts (2, 4), and a valve plate (5) being arranged between the middle and lower housing parts (4, 6).

22. The suction pump as mentioned in above item 21, in which the valve plate (5) and the membrane plate (3) are substantially plane.

23. The suction pump as mentioned in either of above items 21 and 22, in which the valve plate (5) and the membrane plate (3) are made of a plastic, in particular of silicone.

24. The suction pump as mentioned in one of above items 5 through 23, comprising an exhaust (71) and, optionally, a vacuum attachment (70) and an air release attachment (72) which protrude from an outer housing of the pump.
25. The suction pump as mentioned in above items 21 and 24, in which an exhaust attachment (66) is formed integrally on the lower housing part (6) and can be connected to the exhaust (71) formed integrally on an attachment part (7).
26. The suction pump as mentioned in one of above items 21 through 25, in which the lower, middle and upper housing parts (2, 4, 6) can be plugged together so as to form a closed housing assembly.
27. The suction pump as mentioned in above item 26, in which the housing assembly is substantially watertight and can be flushed through via a breast pump attachment (70) to the exhaust (71) and the air release opening (72).
28. A suction pump with a safety valve, in particular a suction pump as mentioned in one of above items 19 through 27, in which the safety valve has a first step (55, 46) which opens at a first underpressure, and a second step (35, 9) which opens at a second underpressure, the first underpressure being quantitatively lower than the second.
29. The suction pump as mentioned in above item 5, in which the air release body has first and second subsidiary bodies (320, 321), the first subsidiary body (320) being connected to an armature (80) of a lifting magnet (8), and the second subsidiary body (321) being connected to the first subsidiary body (320) via a

first spring element (322), and the second subsidiary body (321) having a first air release channel (326) which can be closed by the first subsidiary body (320), the second subsidiary body (321) closing a second air
5 release channel (327), and the second air release channel (327) having a greater diameter than the first air release channel (326). **List of reference signs**

	P	pump unit
10	V	air release unit
	S	safety unit
	I	first level
	II	second level
15	III	third level
	IV	fourth level
	V	fifth level
	1	motor
20	10	drive shaft
	11	connecting rod
	12	ball bearing
	13	eccentric with counterweight
25	2	upper housing part
	20	motor plate
	21	fastening screws
	22	upper locking clip
	23	connecting rod chamber
30	24	magnet chamber
	25	thread opening
	3	membrane plate
	30	centering hole
35	31	vacuum membrane
	32	air release membrane
	32'	first subsidiary area
	32''	second subsidiary area

33	connecting pin
34	first sealing lip
34'	second sealing lip
34''	third sealing lip
5 35	second membrane of the safety valve
4	middle housing part
40	upper catches
41	lower catches
10 42	centering hole
43	vacuum membrane seat
43'	pump chamber opening
44	air release membrane seat
44'	chamber
15 44''	side wall
45	air release attachment
46	safety valve closure of first stage
46'	lateral opening
20 5	valve plate
50	centering hole
51	first control flap
52	second control flap
53	sealing lip for connecting channel
25 54	first air release opening
55	first membrane of the safety valve
6	lower housing part
60	lower locking clip
30 61	connecting pin
62	inlet opening
63	outlet opening
64	connecting channel
65	breast shield attachment part
35 66	exhaust attachment
67	second air release opening
68	safety valve chamber
69	vacuum channel

7	attachment part
70	breast pump attachment piece
71	exhaust
5 72	air release channel
73	spacers
8	lifting magnet
80	armature
10 9	adjusting screw

Patent Claims

1. A suction pump with a safety valve, in which the
5 safety valve has a first step which opens at a
first underpressure, and a second step which opens
at a second underpressure, the first underpressure
being quantitatively lower than the second.
- 10 2. The suction pump as claimed in claim 1, in which
the an release valve has an air release membrane,
and in which this air release membrane and a
vacuum membrane used to generate the vacuum are
designed integrally in the form of a common
15 membrane plate.
3. The suction pump as claimed in claim 2, in which a
part of this membrane plate is designed as a
safety membrane of the safety valve.
- 20 4. The suction pump as claimed in either of claims 2
or 3, in which the pump comprises an upper housing
part which receives a lifting magnet for actuating
the air release membrane and receives an electric
25 motor for actuating the vacuum membrane, a middle
housing part with an air release membrane seat
which is provided for the air release membrane and
which surrounds an air release opening, and with a
vacuum membrane seat for the vacuum membrane, and
30 a lower housing part for forming a vacuum channel
between air release opening and an inlet opening
of the vacuum membrane seat, the membrane plate
being arranged between the upper and middle
housing parts and a valve plate being arranged
35 between the middle and lower housing parts.
5. The suction pump as claimed in claim 4, in which
the valve plate and the membrane plate are
substantially plane.

6. The suction pump as claimed in either of claims 4 and 5, in which the valve plate and the membrane plate are made of a plastic, in particular of silicone.
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7. The suction pump as claimed in one of claims 2 through 6, comprising an exhaust and, optionally, a vacuum attachment and an air release attachment which protrude from an outer housing of the pump.
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8. The suction pump as claimed in claims 4 and 7, in which an exhaust attachment is formed integrally on the lower housing part and can be connected to the exhaust formed integrally on an attachment part.
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9. The suction pump as claimed in one of claims 4 through 8, in which the lower, middle and upper housing parts can be plugged together so as to form a closed housing assembly.
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10. The suction pump as claimed in claim 9, in which the housing assembly is substantially watertight and can be flushed through via a breast pump attachment to the exhaust and the air release opening.
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11. The suction pump as claimed in one of claims 1 to 10, wherein the suction pump comprises an air release valve, the air release valve having an air release opening, an air release body which can close the air release opening sealingly, and an actuating means for actuating the air release body, characterized in that the air release body can be actuated in such a way that, upon opening of the valve, it at first frees only a partial area of the air release opening and thereafter
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frees a larger partial area or the entire air release opening.

12. The suction pump as claimed in claim 11, in which
5 the air release body is an air release membrane, and in which the air release membrane has an edge area at which it can at first be removed from the air release opening upon opening of the valve.
- 10 13. The suction pump as claimed in claim 12, in which the actuating means is a lifting magnet, and the air release membrane is connected to an armature of the lifting magnet via a connecting pin, and the connecting pin is connected to the air release
15 membrane at this edge area thereof.
14. The suction pump as claimed in one of claims 12 to
13, in which the air release membrane has a first partial area with a lesser thickness and a second
20 partial area with a greater thickness, and in which the edge area is arranged in the first partial area.
15. The suction pump as claimed in claim 11, in
25 which the air release body has first and second subsidiary bodies, the first subsidiary body being connected to an armature of a lifting magnet, and the second subsidiary body being connected to the first subsidiary body via a first spring element,
30 and the second subsidiary body having a first air release channel which can be closed by the first subsidiary body, the second subsidiary body closing a second air release channel, and the second air release channel having a greater
35 diameter than the first air release channel.