every 10 to 15 minutes and gradually increase to 5 minutes apart. (To review the pattern of contractions in labor, see Figure 7-13.) Each contraction lasts 30 to 40 seconds and is of mild to moderate intensity.

In the latent phase, the client is aware of the contractions but is relatively comfortable. She is excited that labor has begun and is often anxious about what lies ahead. If the membranes have not ruptured, the woman is encouraged to walk as long as she does not become tired. This is a good time to reinforce teaching to both mother and partner, especially relaxation methods (see Box 7-2) and breathing techniques for different stages of labor (Table 7-4).

The latent phase usually lasts 8 to 10 hours with the first pregnancy. With subsequent pregnancies, it usually lasts about 5 hours.

**Active Phase**

The active phase of the first stage of labor begins when the cervix is dilated 4 centimeters and ends with 8 centimeters of dilatation (see Figure 7-19). Contractions occur every 3 to 5 minutes. They last 60 to 90 seconds and are of moderate to strong intensity. Clients perceive an increased amount of discomfort as the fetus descends through the pelvis, stretching muscles and ligaments. During this phase of Stage one, clients seek a position that reduces discomfort. They may need assistance to change positions. Some devices that may be useful to women in this phase of labor were shown in Figure 7-14. The client now focuses on relaxation and breathing techniques.

The average length of active labor is 4 to 6 hours for the primagravida client and 3 to 4 hours for the multipara client.

**Transition Phase**

The transition phase of the first stage of labor is the period during which the cervix widens from 8 to 10 centimeters (see Figure 7-19). The contractions are strong, occurring every 2 to 3 minutes and lasting 90 seconds. (To review the pattern of contractions in labor, see Figure 7-13.) As the fetus descends deeper into the pelvis and Ferguson’s reflex is triggered, there is a strong urge to push. The client may need to be reminded to focus on relaxation and breathing techniques. As mentioned previously, it is important for the client not to push actively until the cervix is completely dilated. If the client pushes too early, the cervix can tear.

Some behaviors are common during the transition phase of labor. The client frequently becomes restless, irritable, and sometimes angry. Statements such as, “I can’t take it anymore” and “Don’t touch me!”, are common. It is important to help the support person(s) understand that this behavior is a normal part of the labor process.

The average length of the transition phase of Stage one labor is 1 to 2 hours.